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▲ *Donald Trump is expected to announce his candidacy for the 2024 presidential race. Photograph: Eva Marie Uzcategui/AFP/Getty Images*

January 6 panel considers next steps after Trump fails to attend deposition

Lauren Aratani

The special US House committee investigating the January 6 Capitol attack is weighing whether to issue a contempt of Congress referral for Donald Trump after the former president skipped a closed-door deposition with the panel that was scheduled for Monday.

The committee's Democratic chair, Bennie Thompson, said that the contempt of Congress referral targeting Trump "could be an option" - though the Mississippi congressman added that the panel would have to first address a lawsuit filed against it by Trump's lawyers on Friday. The suit challenged the subpoena ordering Trump to appear at the deposition as a violation of executive privilege.

In a joint statement with Liz Cheney, the outgoing Republican congresswoman and vice-chair of the committee, Thompson said that Trump's lawsuit "parades out many of the same arguments that courts have rejected repeatedly over the last year".

"The truth is that Donald Trump, like several of his closest allies, is hiding from the select committee's investigation and refusing to do what more than a thousand other witnesses have done," which is to testify in accordance with panel-issued subpoenas, they said.

Four Trump allies have already been held in contempt of Congress after refusing to comply with committee subpoenas.

The US justice department has declined to charge two who were held in contempt of Congress: former White House chief of staff Mark Meadows and former deputy chief of staff Dan Scavino.

Two others, Steve Bannon and Peter Navarro, were indicted. Navarro's trial is scheduled for January while Bannon was found guilty by a jury and was sentenced to four months in prison as well as a fine of $6,500. Bannon earlier this month appealed the trial and sentence.

With Republicans on Tuesday sitting on the cusp of getting majority control in the House after the recent midterm elections, the committee will dissolve in January.

Along with the pressure from the January 6 committee, Trump has also been facing attacks from fellow Republicans over the midterm election as several of his endorsed candidates failed to win their races. Trump is expected to announce his candidacy for the 2024 presidential race, though any signs of strong support from his party have been dim.

A new poll from conservative group Club for Growth, once a Trump ally, showed Trump polling behind Florida's Republican governor, Ron DeSantis, by double digits in hypothetical runs in Iowa and New Hampshire.

In an interview with ABC News released on Monday, Trump's former vice-president, Mike Pence, said that the US would have "better choices in the future" than Trump. Pence said that he and his family are taking "prayerful consideration" of whether he should run himself in 2024.

"People in this country actually get along pretty well once you get out of politics," Pence said. "And I think they want to see their national leaders start to reflect that same compassion and generosity of spirit.

"So in the days ahead, I think there will be better choices."

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Tesla's construction workers at Texas gigafactory allege labor violations

Alexandra Villarreal in Austin

Construction workers who toiled on one of Tesla's sprawling so-called gigafactories will file a complaint and a case referral with the federal Department of Labor on Tuesday detailing exploitative work conditions they say they experienced while building the plant.

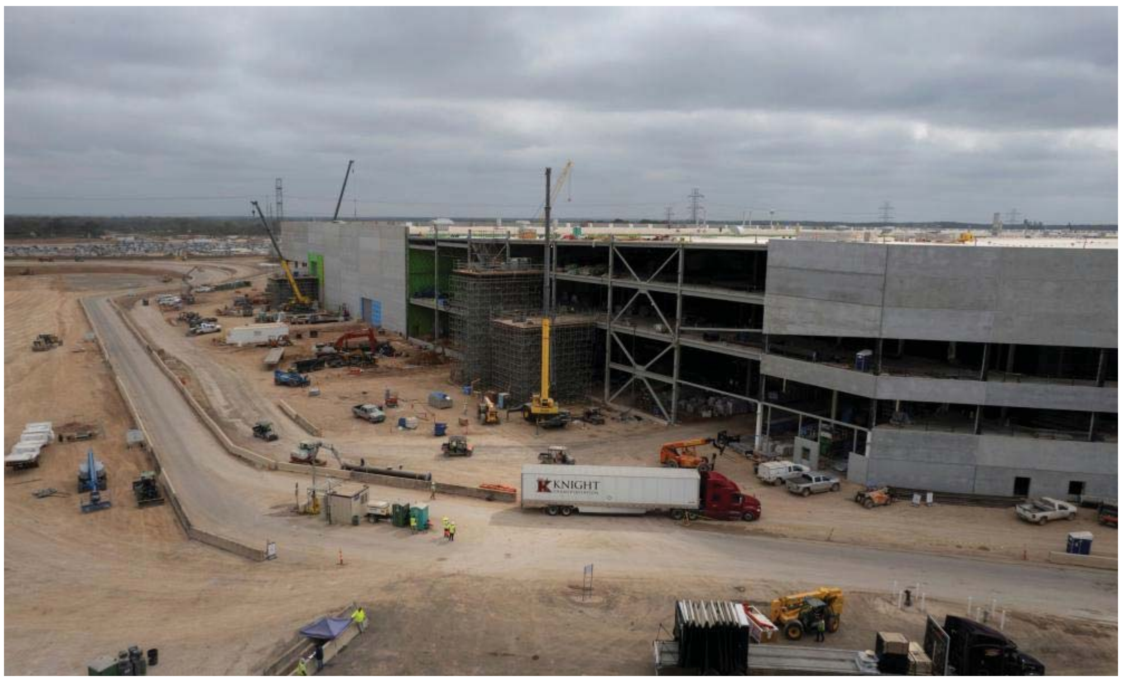
Whistleblowers came forward to allege serious labor and employment violations during construction of the electric car manufacturer's massive new facility in Austin, Texas, that left them vulnerable to injuries and wage theft.

Amid accusations of constant hazards and onsite accidents, one worker said his bosses at an unnamed subcontractor falsified credentials instead of actually providing him and others with required job training involving education about health, safety, and workers' rights – including the right to refuse dangerous work.

Other whistleblowers are reporting what they describe as wage theft and say they weren't paid at all or didn't receive proper overtime compensation for their work on the hi-tech facility.

"Nobody deserves what happened in the gigafactory to happen to them, or their family members, or whomever," Victor, a worker who asked the Guardian to withhold his last name out of fear of retaliation, said in an exclusive interview about working conditions, adding: "I don't think it was humane."

Tesla's 2,500-acre Austin gigafactory was one of the hottest construction jobs in the US after workers broke ground on it in 2020, as multi-billionaire entrepreneur and owner of Tesla, SpaceX and now Twitter, Elon Musk, erected a central US outpost for his auto manufacturer. From outside the project, the new plant sounded like an ideal place for any builder to work.



General view of construction site of the Tesla gigafactory in Austin, Texas, in October 2021. Photograph: Mike Blake/Reuters

The company chose a convenient location along the Colorado River near Austin's airport, which Musk touted as an employment opportunity for thousands where he will manufacture the long-delayed electric pickup Cybertruck. Back in April, Musk donned sunglasses and a black cowboy hat at a "Cyber Rodeo" celebrating the venue's initial opening.

But construction workers have painted a far less rosy portrait of the new factory, suggesting what was supposed to be a dream job turned into a nightmare.

On Tuesday, Victor is filing a complaint with the Occupational Safety and Health Administration (Osha), part of the Department of Labor, over alleged fake certificates of completion for required training he says never happened.

He told the Guardian thathis team was directed to work on the metal factory roof at night with no lights, labor on top of turbines that were blowing smoke without protective masks, and otherwise put themselves at risk without basic information on how to stay safe.

In one instance, Victor said he and his colleagues were expected to keep up production on a flooded first floor – despite observing there was live wiring all over the place and cords in the water. He remembers telling his wife: "I'm going to die in this factory."

On another occasion, Victor worked with a man who was so desperate for money he returned to the job in a brace after breaking his arm on site.

"Every day, there was a safety issue," he told the Guardian.

Other workers sacrificed time with their loved ones to keep building the factory over Thanksgiving last year but say they never received the double-pay bonuses they had been promised, according to Tuesday's case referral to the federal Department of Labor's wage and hour division.

In an industry as fragmented as construction, with its vast network of contractors and subcontractors, workers' rights advocates contend that developers like Tesla are ultimately the ones with the power and moral authority to demand fair working standards.

Yet "Tesla was not – didn't seem – interested in using their power to ensure that everyone was able to go home at the end of the day without injuries, with all the money that they're owed in their pockets," said Hannah Alexander, a staff attorney for Workers Defense Project, a non-profit helping the construction workers.

Tesla did not immediately respond to a request for comment, while Workers Defense Project did not share identifying information about the contractors and subcontractors accused of labor violations for confidentiality reasons amid a pending investigation.

This is not the first time that Musk's car company has been linked to safety violations.

In recent years, Tesla's plant in Fremont, California, has far outpaced other major US auto plants for Osha violations, incurring over $236,000 in fines between 2014 and 2018. Likewise, at its factory outside Reno, Nevada, workers have experienced a slew of injuries, including amputations.

By 2020, when the company set its sights on Austin for another factory, accusations of a too-casual relationship to workers' rights had traveled far, and a broad coalition of labor groups, advocates, and county residents told local government that any deal with Tesla would need to include strong worker protections.

But amid tight competition with other cities also trying to win Tesla's billion-dollar investment, local officials greenlit a plan to draw the electrical carmaker in with millions in tax rebates – and without the enforcement mechanisms advocates warned were necessary.

Now, some workers are dealing with the upshot.

"Everything that we're seeing is complicated by the fact that there isn't a whole lot of transparency or accountability because they decided not to include that independent monitoring piece," said David Chincanchan, Workers Defense Project's policy director.

"In general, the state of the construction industry in Texas tends to be just a race to the bottom," Chincanchan asserted, where exploitation of many vulnerable workers, often immigrants, runs rampant.

Amid Tuesday's filings, the Austin gigafactory is now under fire.

"Everybody's at fault," Victor said. "Anybody could have prevented it. Tesla could have prevented it."

Trudeau raises 'serious concerns' about Chinese interference in talks with Xi

Leyland Cecco and agencies

Justin Trudeau has raised "serious concerns" over suspected domestic interference by China in his first talks with President Xi Jinping in more than three years, amid growing frustration over increasingly aggressive interventions by Beijing.

Trudeau discussed his concerns about Chinese "interference activities" in Canada on the sidelines of a Group of 20 meeting on the Indonesian island of Bali, a government source told AFP.

It came a day after Canadian police announced espionage charges against a battery researcher at Canada's largest energy producer, alleging he tried to steal trade secrets for China, and amid a chorus of warnings that Beijing has sought to undermine Canada's democracy.



Canada's prime minister, Justin Trudeau, speaks with President Xi Jinping of China at the G20 leaders' summit in Bali, Indonesia. Photograph: Adam Scotti/PMO/Reuters

China's embassy in Ottawa did not immediately respond to confirm the meeting or the points of discussion.

The encounter followed repeated warnings from Trudeau and other officials that China had attempted to undermine Canada's democracy. Canadian intelligence officials briefed parliamentarians in January that they believe China interfered in the 2019 federal election.

"I have faith in the report that [intelligence officials] are giving," said David Mulroney, Canada's former ambassador to China. "And I think they're giving those reports with some frustration that more isn't being done. The government continually shies from identifying China as a problem. They're very reluctant. They often say it's China and others, or vaguely that it's state actors behind the interference."

Trudeau and Xi also discussed Russia's invasion of Ukraine, North Korea and the importance of the Cop15 biodiversity conference in December, where China and Canada will co-host nations in an effort to "to protect nature and fight climate change", the source said. They also talked about "the importance of continued dialogue", the source said.

The two leaders met in a crowded room where they spoke for about 10 minutes, the source said. That compares with a three-and-a-half-hour closed-door meeting between the US president, Joe Biden, and Xi on Monday.

Tensions between the two countries have remained high ever since 2018 when Canada, at the request of US officials, arrested the Huawei Technologies executive Meng Wanzhou at a Vancouver airport. Beijing retaliated, arresting two Canadians on spying charges.

While the standoff ended when all three people were released last year, relations have remained sour. Ottawa announced a ban on 5G telecoms infrastructure from Huawei in May, citing national security concerns.

Earlier this month, the industry minister, François-Philippe Cham-

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pagne, ordered three Chinese companies to divest from critical minerals in Canada, also on national security grounds. In early November, federal police announced they were investigating a secret network of illegal Chinese "police stations" in Toronto.

Trudeau and Xi last met in June 2019 on the sidelines of another G20 in Osaka, Japan. The met three other times previously, once in 2015 on the sidelines of the G20 in Turkey, and twice during official visits to Beijing in 2016 and 2017.

Amid pressure to take a more confrontational stance towards China, the federal government is poised to launch a so-called Indo-Pacific Strategy that the foreign minister, Mélanie Joly, says will challenge China on human rights, while seeking cooperation with the world's second-biggest economy on climate change and other shared goals.

"I worry that what we're being promised is an 'Indo-Pacific strategy'. It needs to be a Canada strategy. It definitely has an Indo-Pacific dimension, of course, but the priority has to be dealing with threats in Canada," said Mulroney. "And I see no evidence that anything like this is on the horizon for this government."

US Senate investigates 'catastrophic failure' to protect female migrant detainees

Erum Salam

A US Senate investigation into allegations that unwanted medical procedures were performed on detained female immigrants in Georgia has uncovered "a catastrophic failure by the federal government" to protect the detainees.

A Senate hearing on Tuesday by the bipartisan permanent subcommittee on investigations (PSI), chaired by Georgia senator Jon Ossoff, announced its findings on conditions and practices at the Irwin county detention center (ICDC).

The ICDC, located in Ocilla, Georgia, housed detainees who shared accounts of poor treatment including gynecological procedures that were "excessive, invasive and often unnecessary". An account of what was occurring at the ICDC first came to light when Dawn Wooten, a nurse at the facility, acted as a whistleblower.

Ossoff called the alleged unnecessary and sometimes non-consensual medical treatment and procedures disclosed in the 18-month-long investigation "nightmarish and disgraceful".

Ossoff said: "This is an extraordinarily disturbing finding, and in my view represents a catastrophic failure by the federal government to respect basic human rights."

The detention center, along with Dr Mahendra Amin – its primary medical provider from 2014 to 2020 – were the subjects of the subcommittee's investigation. According to the PSI's investigation, the US government and Department of Homeland Security did not fully vet Amin beyond confirming that he was a licensed doctor affiliated with an accredited hospital.



▲ *Dawn Wooten, left, a nurse at the Irwin county detention center in Ocilla, Georgia, speaks at a news conference in 2020 in Atlanta about conditions at the immigration jail. Photograph: Jeff Amy/AP*

The alleged unnecessary treatment and procedures performed by Amin detailed by the committee's report include laparoscopies to excise lesions, hormonal birth control injections, pelvic exams and a procedure often used for abortions or miscarriages known as "dilation and curettage", which involves the surgical removal of part of the uterus's lining and the widening of the cervix.

The Senate subcommittee sought an interview with Amin and issued a subpoena when he declined. He invoked his fifth amendment right, which protects against self-incrimination.

In December 2020, former ICDC detainees filed a class action lawsuit against the facility, ICE, Amin, the Irwin county hospital and other federal and nonfederal parties for medical mistreatment. The plaintiffs are seeking $5 million in damages and litigation is ongoing.

In the hearing, former ICDC detainee Karina Cisneros Preciado, 23, testified that she was subjected to unsanitary conditions at the facility. Cisneros Preciado was arrested after calling the police when she said she was being abused by the father of her children. The charges were ultimately dropped.

In her testimony, Cisneros Preciado detailed a time when she sought postpartum care in the ICDC and was allegedly handcuffed and given an injection of Depo-Provera, a type of birth control and hormonal medication, for a newly discovered ovarian cyst.

She said: "When Dr Amin comes in, he doesn't acknowledge me. He doesn't say a word. He just sits in front of me and starts prepping for the procedure, which he does not explain."

"Then, he just says 'Open your legs' and continues with 'It's gonna be cold,' and inserts a white tube inside of me. He wiggles it around roughly. It was extremely uncomfortable."

The report also details the harrowing account of another unnamed woman who was detained in the ICDC in 2020. The detainee describes how Amin allegedly removed a portion of her fallopian tube, a result of a dilation and curettage procedure she was not made aware of, and how Amin told her "she would never be able to have children naturally again".

It's not the first time Amin was accused of medical mistreatment. In 2013, he was sued by the US Department of Justice and the state of Georgia. The lawsuit alleged Amin committed Medicaid fraud by violating the Federal Anti-Kickback Statute and Georgia Medicaid policy by conducting unnecessary gynecological procedures.

The lawsuit regarding Medicaid fraud was settled in 2015 and Amin agreed to pay $520,000.

The justice department also alleged Amin maintained "standing orders" requiring nurses to perform treatment on pregnant women "regardless of their condition and without an evaluation from a physician".

However, the subcommittee said it did not substantiate allegations of mass hysterectomies on ICDC detainees. "Records indicate that Dr. Amin performed two hysterectomies on ICDC detainees between 2017 and 2019. Both procedures were deemed medically necessary by ICE," the report said.

Divisions run deep in Uvalde after school shooting: 'If you're not trying you're complicit'

Bekah McNeel for the Trace and the Guardian, with photographs by Christopher Lee

This story was originally published by The Trace, a non-profit newsroom covering gun violence in America. Sign up for its newsletters here.

It took most of the summer for the Uvalde school district to fire Pete Arredondo, the chief of the district police department whose blunders were largely blamed for the high number of casualties at the horrific mass shooting at Robb elementary school. The families of the victims acknowledged that it was the first real response to community demands for accountability, but parents, grandparents and siblings have not stopped organizing to oust – by protest or by election – those who were in charge on 24 May. Now, they're fighting to change gun laws in Texas, a state that prohibits its agencies from enforcing any gun control legislation passed since January 2021.

During sweltering summer protests and the subdued first days of the new school year, Uvaldeans told the Trace and the Guardian about the various ways the community was coming together and falling apart. A county commissioner remembered school walkouts in the 1960s and said he hoped things go differently this time. A former city employee said she had seen the potential for disaster and grieved her own prophetic words. A pastor lent spiritual support to those demanding change, despite pressure to bless the status quo. A high school student struck a balance between the urgency to bring change and taking things more incrementally alongside her peers.

At the center of it all were the families of those who were murdered, whose grief superseded any concerns about civic unity or political allegiance. For them, firing the inept, voting out the gun-friendly and changing gun laws are all part of a mission to make Uvalde safer. To make children safer. Resistance to that mission feels personal.

Speaking at a protest near the Texas capitol on 27 August, Brett Cross, whose 10-year-old nephew and adopted son Uzaiyah was one of the 21 victims, left no room for equivocation. He was there with hundreds to demand that the Texas governor, Greg Abbott, call a special legislative session to raise the

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age to buy assault-style weapons from 18 – the age of the Robb elementary mass murderer – to 21.

"Fight with us," he said. "Because you don't want to be fighting from this side with a hole in your heart."

There is no middle ground left in Uvalde. The shared cause of raising the age for buying assault rifles clarifies the two sides of the fight: those who demand change and those who oppose it. While Abbott himself had told Cross he didn't see guns as the real culprit in Uvalde, to simply accept inaction wasn't an option. Giving up was inconceivable to families who would have given anything to prevent their children from dying. The families saw no good excuse for those unwilling to join their cause.

"If you're not trying," Cross said, "you're complicit."

'We live in Texas'

The Uvalde county commissioner Ronnie Garza regularly takes meetings at his local coffee shop, which is more accurately a Stripes gas station on Main Street. On 30 June he walked to a cooler to get a bottle of water and stopped by the coffee station to fill a paper cup. All the other customers seemed to know him, and they were all talking about gun reform.

He gestured over to a group of regulars – older men in relaxed jeans and trucker caps – populating a few of the vinyl and chrome tables.

"I hear it from these guys too," he said, "Everybody's talking about it."

Even some of his more conservative, gun-owning neighbors have wanted to talk about their suggestions for reasonable changes to gun laws that would have made it more difficult for the Robb elementary gunman to get his hands on the assault rifle he bought online and picked up at Oasis Outback, where he also bought ammunition. Garza was hearing a consensus on guns, but he also knew that these were early days. Time would tell whether his neighbors remained supportive and unified, or if cynicism or hostility would creep in.

A man of deep faith whose family includes more preachers than politicians, Garza turned to his pastor for advice. The pastor told him the coming days would be critical.

"After a loss you either get stronger or you go south," Garza said. While Garza supports the non-controversial Uvalde Together Resiliency Center, which used money from Abbott's office to bring in mental health resources, he doesn't see therapeutic answers as the only support that survivors and bereaved families need.

So Garza has been one of the few elected officials to take up the community's cause of tightening the assault-rifle regulations. He's popular in his largely Democratic precinct, which includes Robb elementary, and has not shied away from controversy in the past. He was the only one of the county's four commissioners to vote for the removal of a monument to former Confederate president Jefferson Davis in front of the county courthouse.

He presented a resolution in July that would marshal the commissioner's court and city council to put their official stamp on the community's demand for the special legislative session to raise the age to buy assault weapons. He presented another resolution in September asking the speaker of Texas's state house of representatives, Dade Phelan, to meet with the families of the victims.

"I'm being realistic," Garza said. "We live in Texas."

The families, too, are grounded in that reality. Jazmin Cazares, who lost her 10-year-old sister Jackie at Robb elementary, acknowledged that they were ready to compromise in the name of progress. While some, Cazares included, would support an assault weapons ban, they chose raising the age from 18 to 21 as a sign of good faith.

But in 2021 the state legislature passed a permitless carry law, allowing anyone over the age of 21 to carry a gun in public without a permit. While the Republicans' complete dominance of state politics has driven some of this, not all Texas Democrats are pushing gun reform either. Tracy King, the state representative for Uvalde, was one of eight Democrats to vote yes to permitless carry.

How ordinary citizens feel about guns is, of course, more nuanced than what is reflected in the laws passed in Austin. While the share of Texans who own guns is only about 36%, because of its size, the state leads the country in gun sales. Political leaders play into the potent myth of the "wild west", where a gun in a holster is nearly as standard as a cowboy hat. Guns are even more culturally ingrained in sprawling rural west Texas. It's more conservative than the urban hubs, populated by both hunters and hobbyists.



▲ *From left: Ronny Garza; Audrey Garcia, with her daughters Alexandra, right, and Gabby Garza; Pastor Daniel Myers. Photograph: Christopher Lee/The Guardian*

Billboards and roadside signs advertising gun sales line the 80 miles between San Antonio and Uvalde along US Highway 90, and over the summer in the tiny town of D'Hanis, 33 miles from Uvalde, a booster organization posted on Facebook that it would raffle off guns, including semi-automatic and AR-556 rifles, as a fundraiser for the D'Hanis independent school district. The post was taken down after Facebook users expressed outrage at the insensitivity, but it's unclear whether the raffle proceeded, and whether D'Hanis's district – which claimed it had not been consulted about the raffle – accepted money from it.

After the Uvalde shooting, Republican congressman Tony Gonzales, who represents Uvalde, supported the Bipartisan Safer Communities Act, a bill that includes model red flag laws, mental health and school safety funding, restrictions for those convicted of domestic abuse, and enhanced background checks for people under 21. It was co-authored by the Texas US senator John Cornyn, a fellow Republican. Gonzalez took some heat for that, political observers said. Cornyn's approval rating also suffered. But their willingness to stand on principle didn't escape notice.

"If it was possible in the [US] Senate, it's possible in the Texas legislature," said Nicole Golden, executive director of Texas Gun Sense. The activism of those affected by gun violence is a vital part of the equation, not only because of their passion, but for their longevity in the fight.

None of these conditions are lost on Garza. He sees them as similar to the heat he feels as he drives around in his truck without air conditioning. It's hot here, and elected leaders are pro-gun. That's life.

Even with all of the protests targeted directly at Abbott, the Republican easily won re-election on 8 November, with 60% of Uvalde county voting for him.

But Garza also knows that, unlike the Texas heat, social and political realities can be fought, and challenging the injustices others take for granted is his family's legacy.

Old wounds

Garza's life in community activism began at Robb elementary. What happened at Robb and in Uvalde in the 1960s and 70s has numerous parallels to what's happening today, with some of the pain tracing along scars that never properly healed, and could easily open again.

Garza's father, George, was a teacher at Robb elementary when it was known locally as "the Mexican school". School facilities were lacking, and parents with concerns were ignored or dismissed. The young teacher, one of a few Latinos on staff, became their advocate, and raised money to improve the facilities.

Then in the spring of 1970, the district chose not to renew George Garza's teaching contract, which infuriated the Mexican-American community. It was a story of an aggrieved Latino community and the predominantly white leadership refusing to meet their demands. They decided to stage a walkout, inspired by what was happening across the American south-west as the Mexican American Youth Organization called attention to educational injustice.

The racial dynamics of both the walkouts and community activism after the Robb elementary shooting are complex. The ethnic distinction between the communities – Hispanic and non-Hispanic for those with Spanish-speaking heritage, or Latino and non-Latino for those whose families are from Latin America – allows for racial overlap, as there are white Hispanics and non-white Hispanics, white Latinos and non-white Latinos. But the community identifying itself as Latino or Mexican-American in Uvalde differentiates itself from what used to be called the "Anglo" community – now referred to mostly as simply "white", based less on specific ancestry or ethnicity, and more on how they have been racialized: empowered or marginalized on the basis of their last name, skin color, culture or language.

In Uvalde, there may be white people with Spanish surnames, and families with blended Latin American and northern European ancestry. But everyone there seems to know who is white and who is Latino, and what that means.

Though the shooting wasn't explicitly racist, and the shooter was Latino himself, the Latino community bore the brunt of the loss. When they took their demands to the mayor, Don McLaughlin, Superintendent Hal Harrell and Abbott, it was hard not to notice that decisions rested in white hands, and those hands have been slow to move.

The ongoing fight is equally nuanced. The majority of those calling for gun reform in Uvalde are Latino, but not all Latinos want gun reform, and some are eager to see the emotions toned down.

Back in 1970 there were Latinos displeased with the confrontational nature of the walkouts too, Ronnie Garza recalled. Not because some Mexican-Americans thought the education system was just, but because keeping the peace with white Uvaldeans was a matter of survival.

Both father and son said they remembered the six-week walkout as a time of both intense unity among the protesters and those who supported them, and perhaps even more intense animosity from those who opposed them. While the protesters got support from students, helicopters circled low above them, and the Texas Rangers stationed snipers on the buildings. George Garza remembers nasty slurs whispered at city council meetings, and political strategies to paint the protesters as radicals with political agendas.

Accusations of interference from more broadly progressive outside groups – political parties and MoveOn, for instance – are muddying the gun-reform debate as well. And it's true that many rallies and online groups tend to attract a wide range of interests aligned with their own ostensible purpose. But the Uvalde rallies and online groups have stayed smaller, and laser-focused. It's about guns. While it's clear the crowd in Austin would have been friendly to something more ambitious like a total assault weapon ban, the speakers generally stuck to their initial proposal, and so did the crowd.

Grief and anger are clarifying their view of politicians. And no matter what happened in the November elections, Garza knew progress would be slow. It was and is slow on integration too, but Garza sees more cooperation and ease between the white and Latino communities in Uvalde now, even beyond the schools. Some churches, notorious for entrenched segregation, are integrated. He sees his father's sacrifices bearing fruit.

But something nags at him. "You know what never gets said?" he asked, "'We're sorry.'"

In refusing to take responsibility for the ravages of segregation, the white leaders placed a burden on the Latino community all those decades ago. The burden of moving on without amends. Now, they are being asked to move on again.

'We're very divided'

George Garza never got his teaching job back, but instead ended up in politics, registering voters and eventually running successfully for local office himself. During his tenure as mayor of Uvalde, Audrey Garcia, who at that time worked as director of human resources for the city, called him "one of the good ones".

In Garcia's mind, that means fighting the status quo, the so-called good ol' boys, who, in her opinion, had set the community up for tragedy. Her daughter Gabby, who has Down's syndrome, was in Eva Mireles's class years ago. Garcia remembers the teacher, who was killed in the shooting, as one of the few who helped her fight to have Gabby included in a general education classroom.

She was shocked when she heard about the shooting, but another part of her had known that if such a crisis ever occurred, Uvalde would not be ready for it.

Garcia was horrified by the way budgets and personnel matters were handled by the Uvalde police department. Promotions were political, budgets were padded and bad behavior went unaddressed. She remembered taking her concerns to the city manager, but, she said, "nothing would ever get resolved."

She also remembered butting heads with Arredondo when he was Uvalde's assistant chief of police. While there's no question he screwed up at Robb elementary, she said, he wasn't an anomaly.

"He's a product of the way things were done," Garcia said. The massacre was a wake-up call. The low-level corruption and incompetence was sort of an open secret before, Garcia said, but the community isn't standing for it any more.



▲ *A memorial at Robb elementary school in Uvalde, Texas, on 10 November.*

Parents of the slain children continued to pressure the school district even after Arredondo was fired, demanding that the entire district police department be suspended and subject to review. When district administrators refused to meet with them, they staged a protest, beginning 27 September and stretching for 10 days, sitting in the parking lot outside district headquarters. On 7 October, the district complied with their request, but attributed the decision to information uncovered during an external review. Then, on 10 October, Harrell announced his retirement.

Garcia knows that lasting change will take more than a single push. As the parent of a student with a learning difference, she knows what it means to challenge an entrenched system. In a tragic coincidence, Mireles, an ally in that fight, was inspiring a new one.

Civic participation is indeed at an all-time high, Garza said. All summer parents flooded school board and city council meetings, demanding to know who will be receiving contracts for school security updates and what options will be available for parents who don't feel safe sending their kids back to school. They wanted those in charge that day to be fired; they wanted poor performance to have consequences.

The local activism and demands for accountability are tied to their desire to see gun reform, Garcia said. A city that feels betrayed by the good ol' boys sees the Texas state capitol and the National Rifle Association as part of the problem.

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The problems of ineptitude and gun reform came together in a gut-wrenching way when the community questioned why the police officers had waited 77 minutes to confront the gunman.

Before the shooting, Garcia said, gun culture, like so many other things in Uvalde, was just assumed to be ubiquitous. It was easier to go along and get along. Garcia now lives in San Antonio, but she talks to friends and colleagues from Uvalde – and the vast majority, she said, are talking about gun reform.

When they aren't behind a desk, many elected leaders and police officers are seated in pews, next to their neighbors. Here, in theory, they are equal before God. But Uvaldeans say they often hear the same message from the pulpit as they do from the political dais: don't question authority.

Preaching from a roadside cafe on the outskirts of Uvalde, primarily to an online audience, pastor Daniel Myers' military-style crew cut and stories about grandchildren reveal a man in his second act.

He has been outspoken online, in public meetings, and in the media – asking not just for prayers, but for action. For changes in gun laws and assurance that law enforcement will take steps to prevent another bungled crisis.

Fellow Uvaldeans, Myers said from an empty cafe after a Sunday service in August, have accused him of "spreading hate and division".

He has felt pressured to focus attention toward the gunman as the lone bad guy, and away from city leadership, but Myers said he can't do that in good conscience. Not when he thinks about Adam Martinez, whose eight-year-old son Zayon was inside Robb during the shooting.

"How can I turn my back on him?" Myers asked.

"You see all these signs that say 'Uvalde Strong,' but that's not true," Myers said. "We're very divided." Murals go up on the walls of local businesses, and football games are won in honor of the victims. But the illusion of unity ruptured when families demanded change.

'We're not marchers or protesters'

In Uvalde, someone's perception of unity or division can depend on who, and where, they are. To Guadalupe Torres, who grew up in Uvalde, community includes his neighbors – not elected leaders or powerful landowners in the rural county surrounding his city.

"The Mexican majority is not represented" in local government, he said. For a long time, he said, "nobody cared about power disparities and gun culture. Now they do, and they are united."

On the surface, Torres seems to contradict those like Myers and Garza who see the divisions running throughout Uvalde. But for Torres, who had never seen his neighbors rally around a common cause like this, the unity of the resistance was more striking than any division. From where he stood, the Latino community was galvanizing to demand changes to a system led by white politicians.

The awakening had some folks rattled, Garza said. By 10 July, it had been about six weeks since the massacre, and emotions were exceptionally raw, grief beginning to turn into anger. In the days leading up to the Unheard Voices rally and march that day, people in city hall and the county courthouse had approached him, nervous, he said. The Brown Berets, a formerly militant Chicano civil rights group, were helping the families organize, raising the specter of massive marches and unrest during the Trump presidency and the Black Lives Matter protests in 2020.

Those movements didn't bring out large crowds in Uvalde. "We're not marchers or protesters," Garza said.

When they have demonstrated in the past, law enforcement has been right on top of them. Literally. In 2020, a US Customs and Border Protection helicopter circled above the 50 people who showed up for a Black Lives Matter event.

Police and sheriff's deputies came to the Unheard Voices rally, but their presence was not overbearing. Parents and victims marched from the school on a 107-degree day, and spoke out to call for accountability and gun reform as they memorialized their children, siblings, and parents. There were still more tears than chants, but the chants had begun.

The only indication that greater organizing efforts were percolating in the community was the presence of David Hogg and Sam Fuentes, survivors of the 2018 school shooting that killed 17 in Parkland, Florida, and organizers with March for Our Lives.

They had been contacted by Guadalupe Torres's teenage daughters, Sofia and Aracely Torres, who were with their parents, wearing March for Our Lives T-shirts. Sofia, a petite power-lifting champion with a wide smile, would return to Midland University in Nebraska, leaving Aracely, a junior at Uvalde high school, to continue the organizing efforts.

'Nobody will ever forget about what happened'

Aracely Torres is taking the long view on organizing. The 17-year-old and her peers want to be involved in the larger push for gun reform, but they also had to get through the tough days ahead, including the first day of school.

As 16 August approached, security updates were still incomplete on Uvalde's campuses, so the district delayed the first day of school until 6 September. That day, students and teachers across Texas wore maroon in a show of solidarity.

It was a long, hectic return for Torres. First days are always a little bumpy with freshmen learning their way around, with new teachers, new course loads. But this year, the new emotional landscape marred any excitement.

"I don't think the buzz was there. It was just weird being back," she said, "Something tragic happens and you can sense that there's something different about this year."

The shooting was a silent backdrop – not because it had become distant, but because it was still so present, she said. "I really don't hear people talking about it. It's out of respect – some of the siblings go to the high school."

Those who did talk, did so in cautious groups, making sure not to upset each other. Mostly they talked about how "surreal" it was to be there, she said. There were explicit reminders of how much had changed: therapy dogs, security cameras and state troopers were visible everywhere. The teens share in the community anger at law enforcement, making it difficult to see cops around every corner. Torres counted five or six.

"There's a lot of police presence now," Torres said, "They said that they weren't there [at Robb] when it happened, but I don't know. I just don't like it."

The dogs, a friendlier presence, are still a reminder that they, as a student body, as a town, as families, as friends, are not OK.

Teachers quietly offered support, and Torres was grateful. The teens seem to have a greater awareness of their own fragility. That extends to organizing too, Torres said. Most of them are primarily focused on supporting their friends. They are keenly aware of what the adults are doing, and are sharing information about it on social media. But if they want to have the stamina they need to change gun laws in this stubborn, stuck state, they have to be healthy. They have to be there for each other.

Standing in the football stadium during the Uvalde Coyotes' first home game this season, Torres said the cheering was unlike anything she'd heard before. The team had dedicated its season to the victims, and the community seemed to pour its passion and resolve into that goal. If the towering dome of the state capitol, the background to so many protests, symbolized everything aligned against them, the cheering stadium represented everyone around them, behind them, for them.

From where Torres stands, losing momentum seems impossible. She said: "Nobody will ever forget about what happened" on 24 May.

The thought that school will ever feel normal again sounds like a vague possibility, but for Torres and many of her friends, she said, part of their life trajectory is set.

They don't have a choice but to fight for gun reform.

Weinstein trial: defense demands graphic details from Jennifer Siebel Newsom

Lois Beckett in Los Angeles

Harvey Weinstein's most prominent accuser faced a grueling cross-examination on Tuesday, as Weinstein's defense attorney hammered her on details, casting doubt on her memory and demanding clarification on the most graphic details of the alleged rape.

It was the second day of testimony from Jennifer Siebel Newsom, a documentary film-maker and the wife of California's governor, Gavin Newsom, and the most high profile woman so far to take the stand against the Hollywood producer.



▲ *Weinstein is serving a 23-year sentence for a conviction in New York. Photograph: Jordan Strauss/Invision/AP*

On Tuesday, she faced a tough cross examination from Weinstein's defense team. More than an hour in, as defense attorney Mark Werksman was asking her to define the word "acquiesce", Siebel Newsom compared the relentless questioning to her interaction with Weinstein himself.

"What you're doing today is exactly what he did to me," she told Weinstein's lawyer.

Weinstein's defense team focused on differences in how Siebel Newsom described the alleged assault over interviews with prosecutors in 2020 and in grand jury testimony in 2021, including asking her why she had not immediately told prosecutors that she had touched Weinstein's penis during the assault.

Siebel Newsom said she did not recall what parts of her experience she had described at different times. "I had everything in a box, and I've been slowly sharing a little bit at a time, because this is so painful," she said.

When she initially met with a detective and a prosecutor in LA in 2020, Siebel Newsom testified, "I didn't think I would be considered a victim because I thought I was out of the time period."

She teared up as she said, "I offered to talk to detectives initially to support other women, not to be up here on the witness stand."

Weinstein's defense attorneys spent hours going through nearly 70 emails Siebel Newsom exchanged with Weinstein in the months and years after the alleged attack. They contrasted her bright tone and multiple requests for in-person business meetings with Weinstein in New York and at film festivals in Toronto and Cannes with her testimony that she had felt fear in her subsequent interactions with Weinstein, and that she had not interacted with him much after the assault.

He also highlighted multiple emails she sent out to groups of people, including Weinstein, asking for campaign contributions for Gavin Newsom, her now-husband, during his tenure as mayor of San Francisco.

Werksman noted her signatures on different emails Weinstein received, including "warm regards" and "xx," and flagged that she had once responded within eight minutes to an email from Weinstein about finding a time to meet in New York.

Siebel Newsom said she simply did not remember sending most of the emails. "I send hundreds of thousands of emails to people," she testified.

"He ruined my life, I put it in a box, and I was not going to not pursue my entertainment career because of what happened," she said.

Continuing to email Weinstein for normal business meetings to network and promote her films was a way "to take control back from someone who had harmed me and violated me", she said. "I was trying to not feel like a victim and be able to live my life."

The emails she sent him were not flirtatious, Siebel Newsom said. The text of several of her emails to him suggested setting up meetings with him and a third person, including friends of hers and his wife.

Siebel Newsom, who had delivered graphic and tearful testimony Monday about her alleged rape at a Los Angeles hotel in 2005, was visibly tired on Tuesday, often asking for the last question to be repeated and a few times sighing deeply into the microphone. But she also contested some lines of questioning, saying her words were being taken out of context.



▲ *Jennifer Siebel Newsom at an #EqualPayCA campaign in Sacramento, California, in 2019. Photograph: Rich Pedroncelli/AP*

Weinstein's attorney was interrupted by objections that his questioning was too argumentative or not relevant, which Judge Lisa Lench often sustained. In a pointed moment, Werksman asked Siebel Newsom to clarify the nature of sexual "noises" she made during the alleged assault, which she said were intended to get Weinstein to end the attack.

When Werksman continued to press her about what the noises sounded like, Siebel Newsom pushed back, saying she would not.

"This is not When Harry Met Sally, I'm not doing that," she said.

Before ending his cross-exami-

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nation, Werksman took a moment to consult quietly with Weinstein himself, who sat silently in the courtroom, before saying he had no further questions. Siebel Newsom did not look in Weinstein's direction during her testimony.

Late in the afternoon, when a prosecutor asked Siebel Newsom to once again confirm whether she had consented during different stages of the alleged assault, Siebel Newsom broke down, saying, "No, no, no, no," to each question and sobbing.

She was still sobbing as the judge dismissed her and she strode quickly from the room.

Elizabeth Fegan, an attorney for Siebel Newsom, said in a statement after the testimony that Weinstein's defense team had "ruthlessly tried to discredit her" but that her client "stood firm".

Siebel Newsom "knew that it might have been easier to keep the memory of her 2005 assault buried" but "she felt an obligation to herself, her family, and most important, to the woman who came forward as well as the women unable to speak out publicly", Fegan said.

Her testimony came as the judge overseeing the Los Angeles trial dropped four of the 11 sexual assault charges against Harvey Weinstein after prosecutors said they would not proceed with the counts involving one of his accusers.

Superior court Judge Lisa Lench dismissed two counts of forcible rape and two counts of forcible oral copulation against the 70-year-old Weinstein.

The move had appeared likely since the trial's opening statements three weeks ago, when prosecutors only mentioned four women Weinstein was charged with assaulting, leaving out the accuser identified in an indictment as Jane Doe 5.

The prosecutors at first kept the charges in place and left open the possibility that the woman would testify, while Weinstein's defense had sought a definitive decision on the issue.

The Los Angeles county district attorney's office has not provided an explanation for why they opted to leave the woman out of the trial.

The remaining charges against Weinstein, who is serving a 23-year sentence for a conviction in New York, are two counts of rape and five other sexual assault counts. He has pleaded not guilty.

The Associated Press contributed reporting

Virginia McLaurin, who danced with Obamas as centenarian, dies at 113

Martin Pengelly in New York



▲ *Obamas dance with energetic 106-year-old guest at White House - video*

Virginia McLaurin, a Washington woman who was 106 when in 2016 she visited and danced with Barack and Michelle Obama in the White House, has died. She was 113 years old.

A family statement on McLaurin's Facebook page said: "With heavy hearts we share that Ms Virginia McLaurin passed away this morning [Monday]. She had been under hospice care for a few days.

"She lived an incredibly full life and appreciated all the love she received from people … everywhere she went. (Before the pandemic that is - for the past few years she largely stayed inside.)"

When McLaurin visited the Obamas, footage of the joyous encounter quickly went viral. On the White House Facebook page, the video has now been viewed 70m times.

When McLaurin started dancing, the then president said: "She's dancing! Come on! What's the secret to dancing at 106?"

Speaking to CTV after the visit, McLaurin said she told Barack Obama: "'It's Black History Month and I'm here to represent Black history.' He said, 'You made our day.' I was happy. Lord, I'm still happy about that."

McLaurin also said she was usually too stiff to dance but when she met the Obamas, "I was so happy I didn't care."

She also told the Washington Post she wished she "could have 30 minutes alone with him", adding: "Oh, you know how women think."

Writing about McLaurin's visit in the Guardian, Syreeta McFadden said that for a Black woman, the sight of McLaurin's joy at meeting the first Black president was hugely symbolic.

"For Black women born early in the 20th century, when the nation suppressed the civil, social and economic liberties of African Americans, when American society actively resisted the humanity of African Americans, to be alive and witness this particular historical moment - McLaurin's dance of joy is celebration hard earned and won. My grandmother, like McLaurin, never expected to live to see the day."

McLaurin was 99 when Obama was elected, in November 2008. In the Guardian, McFadden listed other historic moments from McLaurin's life, from the foundation of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People (NAACP) in the year of her birth, 1909, through the civil rights March on Washington of 1963, when McLaurin was 54.

The family statement announcing McLaurin's death said: "She had an extraordinary memory, sharing stories of family's life as sharecroppers in South Carolina before traveling north in the Great Migration."

It also said that while McLaurin became "best known for her visit to the White House in 2016, she spent decades volunteering 40 hours a week at schools after she retired".

At 104, in 2013, McLaurin was honoured in Washington for her volunteer work with disabled students.

According to a fundraising page set up to cover funeral costs, McLaurin also "volunteered as a foster grandparent and collaborated with other tenants in the fight for quality living conditions [and] was a devoted member of her church".

The page added: "We encourage you to look out for the other Ms McLaurins in your neighborhood. There are elders in every community who give back to the community and could use some support. They also have stories to tell.

"Ms McLaurin came to the attention of the White House after she started recording short oral history interviews."

In a statement on Tuesday, Barack and Michelle Obama said: "Rest in peace, Virginia. We know you're up there dancing."

Major investor calls on Google owner to 'aggressively' cut staff and pay

Mark Sweney



▲ *Christopher Hohn, founder of TCI: 'The company has too many employees and the cost per employee is too high.' Photograph: Peter Macdiarmid/Getty Images*

The hedge fund of the billionaire Sir Christopher Hohn has written to Alphabet saying staff at the Google and YouTube parent are paid too much and its workforce should be drastically cut back.

London-based TCI, which has been a significant investor in the company since 2017 and holds a stake valued at $6bn (£5.1bn), has written to its chief executive, Sundar Pichai, urging it to emulate cost-cutting measures introduced by big tech rivals including the Facebook-owner, Meta, Amazon and Microsoft.

"We are writing to express our view that the cost base of Alphabet is too high and that management needs to take aggressive action," said Hohn, managing director at TCI, in a letter made public on Tuesday. "The company has too many employees and the cost per employee is too high."

Hohn said Alphabet, which employed almost 187,000 staff at the end of the third quarter, has doubled staff numbers since 2017, with headcount growing at 20% annually across the period.

"This growth is excessive, both in relation to historic headcount growth and what the business requires," Hohn said. "Our conversations with former executives of Alphabet suggest that the business could be operated more effectively with significantly fewer employees."

The four-page letter also points the finger at pay, stating that Alphabet offers employees "some of the highest salaries in Silicon Valley".

Last year, median compensation for a typical Alphabet employee was $295,884 according to filings with the Securities and Exchange Commission (SEC), the letter said. This was 67% higher than at Alphabet's rival Microsoft and 153% higher than the 20 largest technology companies in the US, according to analysis by S&P Global.

"There is no justification for this enormous disparity," said Hohn, who added that computer scientists and engineers who can command top pay packets represent only a "fraction" of the employee base. "Many employees are performing general sales, marketing and administration jobs, who should be compensated in line with other tech-

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nology companies."

The call for cost savings comes as job cuts come thick and fast at Silicon Valley companies feeling the pressure from a slowdown in the global economy and income streams such as advertising. Last week, Mark Zuckerberg's Meta, the parent company of Facebook, Instagram and WhatsApp, cut 11,000 staff in the first round of redundancies in the company's history. On Monday, reports emerged that Amazon was preparing to get rid of as many as 10,000 staff in corporate and technology roles, its largest layoffs ever.

Hohn's letter also calls on Alphabet to scale back by at least half the huge annual losses being incurred by its "Other Bets" business, which TCI says has made $3bn in revenues but $20bn in operating losses over the last five years.

TCI singled out the self-driving car experiment Waymo, the biggest source of losses in the division, as an area for cutbacks. Unfortunately, enthusiasm for self-driving cars has collapsed and competitors have exited the market," said Hohn. "Ford and Volkswagen recently decided to shut down their self-driving car venture. Waymo has not justified its excessive investment and its losses should be reduced dramatically."

TCI also called on Alphabet to increase its already substantial share repurchase programme to run down its $116bn of cash, given that large-scale mergers and acquisitions are limited owing to regulatory scrutiny. It urged it to copy Apple's approach and become "cash neutral" over time.

Europe faces 'cancer epidemic' after estimated 1m cases missed during Covid

Andrew Gregory Health editor

Experts have warned that Europe faces a "cancer epidemic" unless urgent action is taken to boost treatment and research, after an estimated 1m diagnoses were missed during the pandemic.

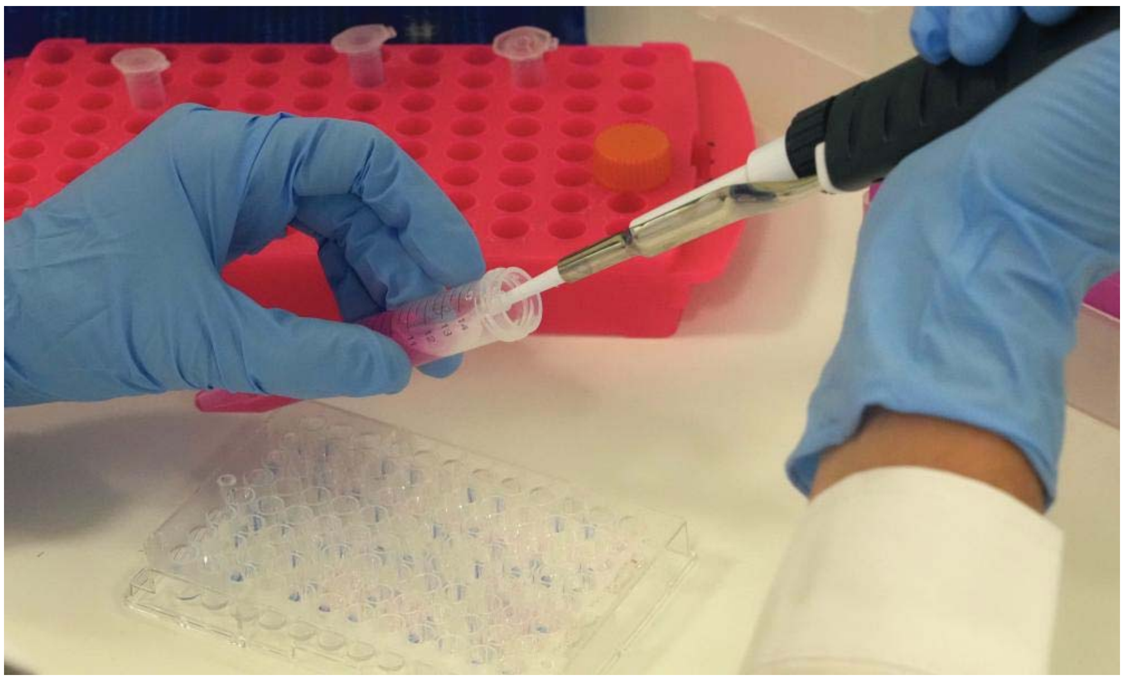
The impact of Covid-19 and the focus on it has exposed "weaknesses" in cancer health systems and in the cancer research landscape across the continent, which, if not addressed as a matter of urgency, will set back cancer outcomes by almost a decade, leading healthcare and scientific experts say.

A report, European Groundshot – Addressing Europe's Cancer Research Challenges: a Lancet Oncology Commission, brought together a wide range of patient, scientific, and healthcare experts with detailed knowledge of cancer across Europe.

One unintended consequence of the pandemic was the adverse effects that the rapid repurposing of health services and national lockdowns, and their continuing legacy, have had on cancer services, on cancer research, and on patients with cancer, the experts said.

"To emphasise the scale of this problem, we estimate that about 1m cancer diagnoses might have been missed across Europe during the Covid-19 pandemic," they wrote in The Lancet Oncology. "There is emerging evidence that a higher proportion of patients are diagnosed with later cancer stages compared with pre-pandemic rates as a result of substantial delays in cancer diagnosis and treatment. This cancer stage shift will continue to stress European cancer systems for years to come.

"These issues will ultimately compromise survival and contribute to inferior quality of life for many European patients with cancer."



▲ *A scientist at a lab in Bilbao, Spain. The report warns that cancer health systems and research must be urgently prioritised to avoid a Europe-wide epidemic. Photograph: Europa Press News/Getty Images*

The report analysed data and found clinicians saw 1.5 million fewer patients with cancer in the first year of the pandemic, with one in two patients with cancer not receiving surgery or chemotherapy in a timely manner. About 100m screenings were missed, and it is estimated that as many as 1 million European citizens may have an undiagnosed cancer as a result of the backlog.

"We estimate that approximately 1m cancer diagnoses were missed across Europe during the Covid-19 pandemic," said Prof Mark Lawler, of Queen's University Belfast, the chair and lead author of the commission. "We are in a race against time to find those missing cancers.

"Additionally, we saw a chilling effect on cancer research, with laboratories shut down and clinical trials delayed or cancelled in the first pandemic wave. We are concerned that Europe is heading towards a cancer epidemic in the next decade if cancer health systems and cancer research are not urgently prioritised."

The Russia invasion of Ukraine represents another huge challenge to cancer research in Europe, the report says. Russia and Ukraine are two of the largest contributors to clinical cancer research in the world. The commission also predicts Brexit will negatively impact European cancer research.

"With the backdrop of the Covid-19 pandemic, Brexit, and the Russian invasion of Ukraine, it is more important than ever that Europe develops a resilient cancer research landscape to play a transformative role in improving prevention, diagnosis, treatment, and quality of life for current and future patients and those living beyond cancer," said Lawler.

The report also argues that cancer prevention efforts and research, in particular, have not had the funding they deserve. A greater focus on preventing cancer would reduce the number of people who develop cancer and therefore allow more resources to be available for those who do require treatment, it says.

"It is estimated that 40% of cancers in Europe could be prevented if primary prevention strategies made better use of our current understanding of cancer risk factors," said Anna Schmütz, of the International Agency for Research on Cancer.

Georgia's six-week abortion ban overturned as unconstitutional

Associated Press in Atlanta

A judge overturned Georgia's ban on abortion starting around six weeks into a pregnancy, ruling on Tuesday that it violated the US constitution and US supreme court precedent when it was enacted.

The ruling by Judge Robert McBurney of Fulton county superior court applies statewide. The ban had been in effect since July.

It prohibited most abortions once a "detectable human heartbeat" is present. Cardiac activity can be detected by ultrasound in cells within an embryo that will eventually become the heart as early as six weeks into a pregnancy. That means most abortions in Georgia were in effect banned at a point before many women knew they were pregnant.



▲ *People gather in front of the Georgia state capitol in Atlanta on 24 June to protest against the supreme court's decision to overturn Roe v Wade. Photograph: Ben Gray/AP*

McBurney's ruling came in a lawsuit that sought to strike down the ban on multiple grounds, including that it violates the Georgia constitution's right to privacy and liberty by forcing pregnancy and childbirth on women in the state. The lawsuit filed by doctors and advocacy groups in July also argued that Georgia's abortion ban was invalid because it violated the US constitution and US supreme court precedent when it was enacted.

McBurney agreed with that argument in his decision.

Georgia's law was passed by state lawmakers and signed by the Republican governor, Brian Kemp, in 2019 but had been blocked from taking effect until the supreme court overturned Roe v Wade, which had protected the right to an abortion for nearly 50 years. The 11th US circuit court of appeals allowed Georgia to begin enforcing its abortion law just over three weeks after the high court's decision in June.

McBurney said when the law was enacted, "everywhere in America, including Georgia, it was unequivocally unconstitutional for governments – federal, state, or local – to ban abortions before viability."

He said the state's law "did not become the law of Georgia when it was enacted and it is not the law of Georgia now".

The state has argued that the Roe decision itself was wrong and the supreme court ruling wiped it out of existence.

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Raphael Warnock sues Georgia over early voting restrictions for runoff

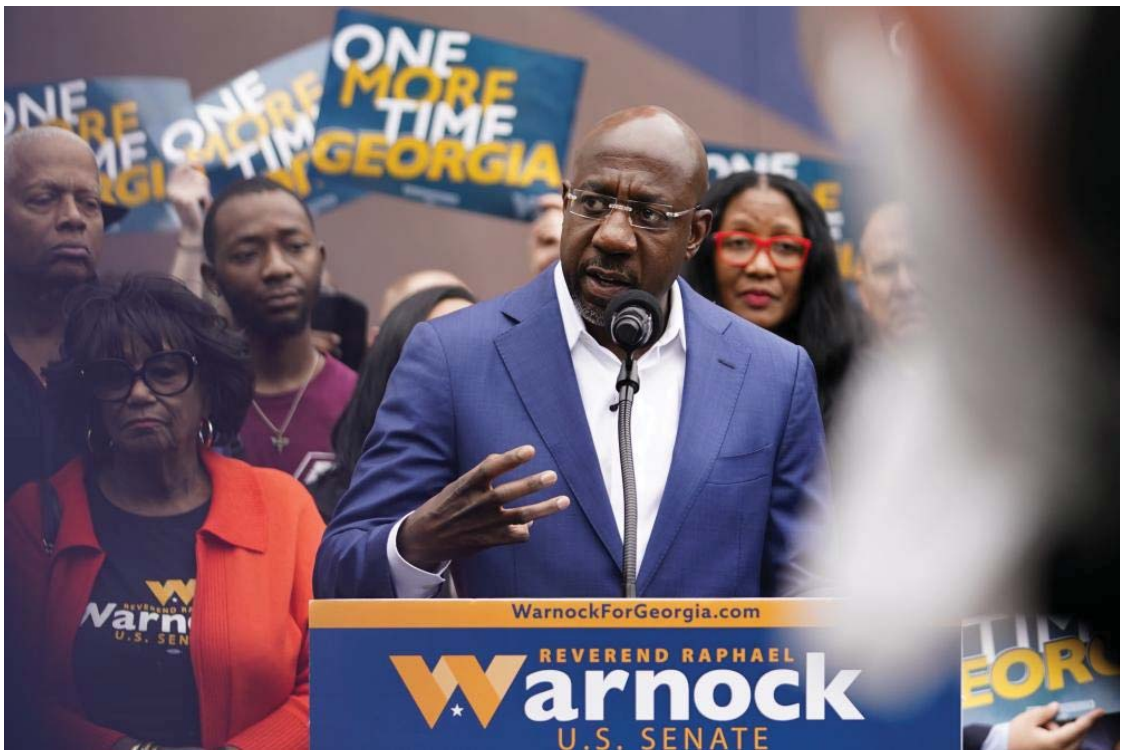
Sam Levine in New York

Raphael Warnock's campaign sued Georgia on Tuesday after the state said it would not offer Saturday early voting for the closely watched runoff in which Warnock is seeking re-election to the US Senate.

The suit challenges the state's interpretation of a law that would prohibit early voting on the Saturday following Thanksgiving. The day after Thanksgiving is also a state holiday in Georgia, originally to commemorate Robert E Lee, the Confederate civil war general. In 2015, state officials dropped Lee's name and started recognizing the day simply as a "state holiday".

Lawyers for Warnock's campaign argued that the voting prohibition only applies to primary and general elections, not runoffs, which have a much shorter voting period. Last year, Georgia Republicans passed a law shortening the runoff period from nine weeks to four. But the shortened runoff period is coming into conflict with the state law that bars early voting around holidays.

The state "misreads" and "cherry-picks" provisions of the law that do not apply to runoffs, lawyers for Warnock's campaign wrote in a complaint, which was joined by the Georgia Democratic party and the Democratic Senatorial Campaign Committee. "The secretary's insistence that counties may not hold advance voting on November 26 therefore has no support in the law and conflicts with [the statute's] requirement that counties begin advance voting for the December 6 runoff as soon as possible," it reads.



▲ *Democratic Senator Raphael Warnock speaks during a news conference on 10 November 2022 in Atlanta, Georgia. Photograph: Brynn Anderson/AP*

The suit asks a judge to declare that state law does not prohibit counties from offering early voting on the Saturday after Thanksgiving and to order the state not to take any action blocking them from doing so.

Georgia law says counties may start early voting "as soon as possible" after the state certifies results from the general election, with a mandatory period from 28 November to 2 December. State law also bars Saturday early voting on the Saturday before a runoff, 3 December.

Georgia's secretary of state, Brad Raffensperger, initially said he believed some counties would offer early voting on Saturday, before his office reversed course and said it was prohibited.

"It's not our choice. It's literally in black-letter law that the Saturday following a state holiday cannot be used for early voting," Gabriel Sterling, an interim deputy secretary of state, told the Atlanta Journal Constitution. "We all thought there was going to be Saturday voting until we looked at the law really closely."

Gerald Griggs, the president of the Georgia NAACP, said a Confederate holiday should not block voting.

A coalition of civil rights groups separately sent a letter to all of Georgia's 159 counties on Tuesday urging them to offer at least three additional days of early voting from 7am to 7pm, which is allowed at the counties' discretion under Georgia law. The coalition urged the counties to offer voting on the Tuesday and Wednesday preceding Thanksgiving as well as the Sunday after the holiday.

"If you only offer advance voting on the five days required by statute (which, as noted above, is limited to weekdays), there is a significant risk that many voters will be unable to participate due to obligations during the workday," lawyers for the NAACP Legal Defense Fund, the Southern Poverty Law Center and the ACLU of Georgia wrote in the letter. "The lack of weekend or evening voting options is especially concerning for voters of color, who may be less able to take time off from work to vote."

Hillary Holley, the executive director of Care in Action, the political arm of the National Domestic Workers Alliance, tweeted on Tuesday that Fulton county, home to Atlanta and the state's most populous county, had agreed to start early voting on the Sunday after Thanksgiving. She also said Gwinnett county, one of the largest and most diverse counties in the state, had also agreed to start early voting on Sunday.

Walmart announces $3.1bn plan to settle opioids lawsuits

Associated Press

Retail giant Walmart on Tuesday become the latest major player in the drug industry to announce a plan to settle lawsuits filed by state and local governments over the toll of powerful prescription opioids sold at its pharmacies with state and local governments across the US.

The $3.1bn proposal follows similar announcements on 2 November from the two largest US pharmacy chains, CVS Health and Walgreen Co, which each said they would pay about $5bn.

Walmart, based in Bentonville, Arkansas, said in a statement that it "strongly disputes" allegations in lawsuits from state and local governments that its pharmacies improperly filled prescriptions for the powerful prescription painkillers. The company does not admit liability with the settlement plan.

Letitia James, New York's attorney general, said in a release that the company would have to comply with oversight measures, prevent fraudulent prescriptions and flag suspicious ones.

"For decades, the opioid epidemic has ravaged communities here in New York and across the country," said James. "Pharmacies such as Walmart played an undeniable role in perpetuating opioids' destruction, and my fellow attorneys general and I are holding them accountable. You cannot put a price on lives lost and communities destroyed, but with the $2.1bn we have delivered to New York, we will continue to recover, rebuild, and strengthen our defenses against future devastation."



▲ *Walmart said it 'strongly disputes' allegations in lawsuits that its pharmacies improperly filled prescriptions for powerful prescription painkillers. Photograph: Nam Y Huh/AP*

Lawyers representing local governments said the company would pay most of the settlement over the next year if it is finalized.

The deals are the product of negotiations with a group of state attorneys general, but they are not final. The CVS and Walgreens deals would have to be accepted first by a critical mass of state and local governments before they are completed. Walmart's plan would have to be approved by 43 states. The formal process has not yet begun.

The national pharmacies join some of the biggest drugmakers and drug distributors in settling complex lawsuits over their alleged roles in an opioid overdose epidemic that has been linked to more than 500,000 deaths in the US over the past two decades.

The tally of proposed and finalized settlements in recent years is more than $50bn, with most of that to be used by governments to combat the crisis.

In the 2000s, most fatal opioid overdoses involved prescription drugs such as OxyContin and generic oxycodone. After governments, doctors and companies took steps to make them harder to obtain, people addicted to the drugs increasingly turned to heroin, which proved more deadly.

In recent years, opioid deaths have soared to record levels around 80,000 a year. Most of those deaths involve an illicitly produced version of the powerful lab-made drug fentanyl, which is appearing throughout the US supply of illegal drugs.

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'If I could buy freedom, I would': LA residents who can't afford bail sue to change system

Sam Levin in Los Angeles



▲ LA county's jail system has faced claims of widespread abuse and 'barbaric' conditions. Photograph: Étienne Laurent/EPA

Los Angeles residents jailed because they can't afford to pay bail have filed a class-action lawsuit challenging the system that often keeps low-income people behind bars before they've been charged.

The complaint was filed on Monday on behalf of six people in LA jails who were recently arrested but have not yet seen a judge, been arraigned or assigned a public defender.

The case is the first to challenge LA's "bail schedule", the county's formal guidelines for the cash amounts based on alleged offenses.

LA county is home to the largest jail system in the US, which has recently been mired in scandals involving claims of widespread physical abuse against incarcerated people and "barbaric" conditions where people are chained to chairs for days and made to sleep on concrete floors. Bail leaves thousands of poor people behind bars, according to Public Justice's Debtors' Prison Project and the Civil Rights Corps, two non-profit groups that filed the suit.

The consequences of this bail system can be fatal, lawyers said. The complaint lists 10 people who died in LA jails while they couldn't afford to pay bail and before they were arraigned and formally charged.

The bail they faced ranged from $500 to $100,000.

One plaintiff, Phillip Urquidi, 25, lives in his pickup truck and makes $500 a week at a temp staffing agency. He was arrested by the Los Angeles police department (LAPD) on 9 November for a charge of vandalism alleging damage of $400 or more, the suit says. He was told he would be released the next morning, but instead has remained in jail with his bail set at $20,000.

Urquidi has not been given a public defender or seen a judge. He has been housed in a bedbug-infested cell and unable to take his medications, the suit says. His girlfriend has been left alone in their truck and has no money for gas. Two days after his arrest, he was told that the district attorney did not plan to prosecute him, but he still hasn't been released, according to the complaint.

In a handwritten declaration, Urquidi wrote: "If I could afford to buy my freedom, I would. The conditions here are awful - expired food, trash everywhere, it's unsanitary … There is no one in my family who could come bail me out."

Another jailed plaintiff, Terilyn Goldson, became unhoused earlier this year and had recently been living in a tent community, hoping to transfer to a shelter, the suit says. She was arrested on 9 November by the LA sheriff's department (LASD) on a vehicle code charge of reckless evading. Her bail is $75,000.

"I have family members who love me … but that is so much money I can't imagine how they would be able to help me," Goldson wrote, adding that she has been forced to wear a gown that does not properly cover her and has left her cold.

Leslie Bailey, director of Public Justice's Debtors' Prison Project, said she had visited Goldson in jail and that the conditions were freezing and the gown had left Goldson exposed: "It is so heartbreaking to see them in this situation and to know that if they had the money, they wouldn't be suffering like this."

Another defendant, Susana Perez, is unhoused and had been living in a van for three years and was arrested by LAPD for vandalism, with $20,000 bail: "I cannot afford to hire an attorney and I do not have a public defender yet," she wrote in her declaration. Perez said her food stamps had recently been cut off and that she needed to get out of jail so she could complete her paperwork: "When I suffer, my family suffers too. I want a safe and stable place to live."

All of the plaintiffs are unhoused or precariously housed and struggling with poverty.

The attorneys cited a California supreme court ruling that stated "conditioning detention on the arrestee's financial resources, without ever assessing whether a defendant can meet those conditions or whether the state's interests could be met by less restrictive alternatives" was unconstitutional. The complaint argues that there is no public safety justification and plaintiffs are not considered too dangerous to release. Others with identical charges would get out immediately if they had the funds, the suit says.

"Being jailed for even short periods of time may cause them to lose their jobs, their housing, or custody of their children," the complaint says.

The suit was filed against the city and county of LA and the LAPD and LASD. The LA city attorney's office declined to comment and spokespeople for the other agencies did not immediately respond to inquiries on Monday.

A similar lawsuit in San Francisco led to changes in the bail system, and advocates in Los Angeles hope this challenge will undo the bail policies that leave people incarcerated based on their inability to pay.

"The legal system can push people further towards the brink rather than doing anything to protect public safety or help society at large," said Brian Hardingham, another attorney on the case.

Bail has become a national issue in the US and a point of debate during the midterm elections, during which some candidates focused on crime concerns and opposing criminal justice reform. Defenders of cash bail, including law enforcement groups, have argued that bail is necessary for safety, but research has suggested otherwise. A reform in a Texas county eliminating cash bail for some offenses led to a reduction in jail time and recidivism, a recent study found. Research has also repeatedly shown that people are more likely to plead guilty if they are in jail and can't afford bail.

Trump v DeSantis: Republicans split over 2024 run and predict 'blood on the floor'

Chris McGreal



▲ Donald Trump and Ron DeSantis in November 2019, in Sunrise, Florida. Photograph: Joe Raedle/Getty Images

Terri Burl was an early member of Women for Trump. As chair of her local Republican party branch in northern Wisconsin, she twice campaigned vigorously for his election in the key swing state. By the time Trump left office, Burl rated him the greatest president since Ronald Reagan. Maybe even better.

But now Burl has had enough.

She viewed the prospect of Trump announcing another run for the presidency - as he did in Florida on Tuesday evening - with trepidation. Burl predicts "a lot of blood on the floor" if it comes to a fight with rightwing Florida governor Ron DeSantis for the Republican nomination, and defeat in the 2024 election if the former US president is the candidate.

"I will back whoever the Republicans choose to run in 2024. That's a given. But I want them to go through the primaries and I hope it's not Trump. He has too much baggage now. We need new blood because it's obvious that he can't get to business now without doing things to make people angry. His behaviour hasn't changed," she said.

Burl, a substitute teacher, is not alone.

The Republicans' failure to deliver the much promised "red wave" in the midterms was a significant blow to Trump's claim to be the voice of his party's voters, not least because of the defeat of key candidates endorsed by him. But backing from the grass roots, which gave him a tight grip on the Republicans for years and kept its hostile leadership at bay, has been eroding for months.

Republican county chairs and activists say support for the former president has diminished as a result of his continued pushing of election conspiracy theories, the investigations into his businesses and political actions, and his attacks on his most threatening challenger, DeSantis. Above all, there is a deepening fear that Trump is now even more divisive than he was two years ago when he lost the popular vote to Joe Biden by more than 7m votes, and is therefore unelectable.

But local Republican leaders also say that Trump retains a substantial and virulently loyal following within the party that will fight to the last and could still decide the primaries.

In rural Iowa, Neil Shaffer, chair of the Howard county Republican party, said he would rather see DeSantis as his party's candidate in two years but that the membership of his branch is split.



▲ Former president Donald Trump greets guests at Mar-a-Lago on election day, in Palm Beach, Florida. Photograph: Andrew Harnik/AP

"Honestly, Trump's got a lot of baggage, self-inflicted. Had he taken the loss gracefully, and held his tongue, and didn't further these conspiracy theories, he probably could have been a president again, with an interim of Biden," he said.

"People that came to the Trump bandwagon, there were a lot of independents, a lot of first-time voters, a lot of everyday people. They did over-

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look some of the issues. Since then, a lot of the people that I've talked to that were first-time Republican voters would have a very difficult time being as enthusiastic for Trump this time around just because of how he didn't gracefully take an exit. He lost a lot of political capital between November 2020 and January 6, and unnecessarily. All self-inflicted."

Shaffer said he has faith in the electoral system and that Biden legitimately won the election.

Like Burl, Shaffer wants to see other candidates challenge Trump for the Republican nomination.

"I honestly am a big fan of Governor DeSantis and have been for several months just following through this last campaign. Fresh face. Has the same kind of agenda as Trump without all the baggage," he said.

But Shaffer, speaking before Trump's announcement, said he doubted Trump could be beaten.

"If Trump runs, I'm 99% sure he'll have the nomination. I know how caucuses and primaries work. You don't have to have that many people show up and he has a very loyal and dedicated following," said Shaffer.

Burl is not so sure that Trump would win the primaries but she predicts a bitter fight that could further damage the Republican party.

"If these two guys are the ones that are left, going back and forth, I think it's gonna be brutal. There will be a lot of blood on the floor," she said.

A YouGov poll in the days immediately after the midterms gave DeSantis a seven-point lead over Trump among Republican primary voters, including independents. That's a shift from a month before the elections when Trump had a 10-point advantage. However, among "strong Republicans", Trump retains a narrow lead.

Burl administrates a private Facebook group, American Patriots. She polled its members and found that Trump had a slight edge in support. In other social media forums, some of his supporters say he is a "proven fighter" who can connect with the public in ways no other politician can. Others say the time has come to "dump Trump".

"I love what DJT did for America. But … is he even electable?" asked one of his supporters.

Others questioned his judgment after he backed weak candidates in the midterms solely because they were loyal to his claim that the last presidential election was stolen.

Trump's deriding of his Florida rival as Ron "DeSanctimonious" days before the midterms was a last straw for some. Then he took to Fox News to warn off DeSantis from running for the presidency, saying "he could hurt himself very badly" and threatening to "tell you things about him that won't be very flattering".

"I think he would be making a mistake. I think the base would not like it. I don't think it would be good for the party," said Trump.

Burl said she was "shocked" by the former president's attack on DeSantis.

"Trump is starting to call him names and that really disappointed me. And then he said that if DeSantis tries to run against him, he's got some dirt on DeSantis that he's going to bring up. That's not the way to do things," she said.

Burl said some Republicans were concerned that while they saw Trump as his own man, DeSantis was too much of an accomplished politician whose decisions are calculated according to what he thinks will play well with voters.

"Some people are saying that they don't trust DeSantis because they think that he will cross into the establishment side. I'm not establishment. I don't like establishment candidates. I like people like Trump," she said.

"But even though some people might look on DeSantis as establishment right now, I think he is coming out as his own type of Republican and really doesn't want to cavort with all of the establishment Republicans and do what they say."

Shaffer is concerned about the damage Trump will do to the Republican party, and its presidential nominee, if he loses and goes down fighting.

"How does Trump run and not tarnish the other candidates?" he said.

And if Trump is the nominee? Shaffer said he would still campaign for the former president, but doesn't relish the prospect.

"If Trump got the nomination it will be a much more difficult for him this time around than it was in 2020. We're gonna have to work very hard, much harder than in 2016 or two years [ago]," he said.

Michelle Obama says Donald Trump's election victory in 2016 'still hurts'

Jamie Grierson

Michelle Obama has said Donald Trump's rise to power in the 2016 US election "still hurts" but she and her husband had "laid a marker in the sand" with his presidency.

The former first lady said "leadership matters" but ruled out the possibility of running for president herself in future.

In the run-up to the release of her new book, The Light We Carry, she spoke to BBC Breakfast about the political polarisation in the UK and US.

Asked about the American electorate's decision to replace Barack Obama with Trump, she said it "still hurts", and she sometimes questioned if her husband's time in office had mattered.

"When I'm in my darkest moment … my most irrational place, I could say, well, maybe (it didn't matter). Maybe we weren't good enough.

"But then I look around when there is more clarity … and think more rationally, I think well … today there's a whole world of young people who are thinking differently about themselves because of the work that we've done. And that's where you can't allow great to be the enemy of the good.



Michelle Obama: 'We laid a marker in the sand.' Photograph: NBC/Nathan Congleton/Getty Images

"You know, did everything get fixed in the eight years that we were there? Absolutely not. That's not how change happens. But we laid a marker in the sand. We pushed the wheel forward a bit.

"But progress isn't about a steady climb upward. There are ups and downs and stagnation. That's the nature of change. And that's why the work that we're doing today is about empowering the next generation, the generation that we're handing the baton over to and making space for them to make their mark on history."

Obama said it was important to have leadership that "reflects the direction that we want to go in as a people" and that made the general public "feel seen".

"Leadership matters," she said. "The voices at the top matter if we can continue to be susceptible to voices that want to lead by fear and division. That's why government matters, democracy matters. Voting matters. So I think it starts with having leadership that reflects the direction that we want to go in as a people."

Asked what question she most disliked being asked, she said: "Are you going to run for president?' I detest it."

"I'm not going to run," she added.

Katie Hobbs defeats election denier Kari Lake in Arizona governor race

Maanvi Singh

The Democratic candidate for governor in Arizona, Katie Hobbs, has defeated her far-right, Trump-endorsed opponent, staving off a major threat to voting rights in the state.

Hobbs, who is Arizona's outgoing secretary of state, defeated Kari Lake, a former TV anchor who denies the 2020 election results. Lake has refused to say if she would accept defeat this time around but tweeted "Arizonans know BS when they see it" after Monday's result emerged. The Associated Press projected Hobbs as the winner on Monday evening with more than 95% of votes reported.

Hobbs celebrated her win on Twitter with the message: "Democracy is worth the wait."

Hobbs rose to prominence as a staunch defender of the legitimacy of the last election and warned that Lake would be an agent of chaos. Lake's loss adds further evidence that Trump is weighing down his allies in a crucial battleground state as the former president gears up for an announcement of a 2024 presidential run.

The two candidates had been virtually tied in polls, and Hobbs's refusal to debate Lake and her lukewarm performance in televised appearances had worried supporters in the weeks ahead of the election.

Hobbs gained support and national recognition as Arizona's top election official, defending the state's results against a frenzy of disinformation and repeated efforts by Republicans to challenge and undermine Joe Biden's victory in 2020, even as she became the target of death threats.

Voting rights advocates are breathing a sigh of relief, as Hobbs staves off further damage to Arizona's election systems. Republican lawmakers in the state introduced at least 81 bills seeking to restrict voting access in 2021 and 2022.

Had she won, Lake had vowed to further dismantle voting norms in the state, arguing winners should be declared on election night – a rare occurrence in Arizona, where mail-in votes can take days to count – while also forgoing ballot counting machines in favor of slower and less accurate hand counts.

And in recent months, rightwing activists had aggressively operated in the state. Hobbs referred several complaints of voter intimidation to law enforcement and the US justice department. And members of the conspiracy theorist group Clean Elections USA had been photographing and intimidating election workers and voters outside the Maricopa county election headquarters in Phoenix.

Hobbs's victory appears to be yet

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another sign that the Copper state, once a conservative bastion, has transformed into a political battleground. Demographic changes and a decade of activism by grassroots, progressive groups have helped amplify the voices of young and Latino voters, who have been helping deliver key victories for Democratic candidates.

Her win also marks a midterm coup for the Democratic party, who defied expectations of a "red wave" to hold on to their Senate majority, although Republicans are favored to win a majority in the US House of Representatives.

Abortion rights may have also been a motivator for many voters. In a recent poll, more than 90% of Arizona voters opposed a total ban on abortion. After Arizona revived a pre-statehood ban on abortions, Hobbs made the issue central to her campaign, speaking in personal terms about the impact such a ban would have on women and families.



▲ *Katie Hobbs had defended the results of the 2020 election despite receiving death threats. Photograph: Ross D Franklin/AP*

Lake, meanwhile, ran on a deeply conservative platform, supporting a total ban on abortions and vowing to declare an "invasion" at the southern border. A staunch supporter of Trump, she had also threatened to only accept the election results if she won.

Before entering politics, Hobbs was a social worker who worked with homeless youth and an executive with a large domestic violence shelter in the Phoenix area. She was elected to the state legislature in 2010, serving one term in the house and three terms in the senate, rising to minority leader.

Hobbs eked out a narrow win in 2018 as secretary of state and was thrust into the center of a political storm as Arizona became the centerpiece of the efforts by Trump and his allies to overturn the results of the 2020 election. She appeared constantly on cable news defending the integrity of the vote count.

The attention allowed her to raise millions of dollars, and her profile, before going on to comfortably win her primary.

She will succeed the Republican governor, Doug Ducey, who was prohibited by term limit laws from running again. She is the first Democrat to be elected governor in Arizona since Janet Napolitano in 2006.

The Associated Press contributed reporting

China circles El Salvador's economy as country edges toward crypto plunge

Mat Youkee

As crypto-Twitter cascaded with apocalyptic memes about the bankruptcy of cryptocurrency exchange FTX and the sharp drop in the bitcoin price, one account has remained notably silent on the topic.

Unlike in previous crashes, the president of El Salvador, Nayib Bukele, who made bitcoin legal tender a year ago, did not exhort his followers to "buy the dip". The laser eyes, popular among crypto currency traders, have long since been removed from his Twitter profile.

On the day that FTX declared insolvency, he announced that the country would sign a free trade agreement with China. His vice-president, Félix Ulloa, said that China had offered to buy the country's $21bn in foreign debt as part of the deal.

The Central American country of 6.5 million finds itself in a tough financial position. In January it must pay €667m ($688m)for a Eurobond amortization. At the beginning of the year Bukele promised that his country would issue bitcoin-denominated bonds to pay off national debt and forecast that the price of bitcoin would reach $100,000.

But the so-called "volcano bonds" never emerged and today the bitcoin price hovers around $16,000. The best tracker of the president's opaque trading estimate that he has spent over $107m on 2,381 bitcoin. Today that investment is worth a little over $40m.



▲ *Nayib Bukele, president of El Salvador, at the closing ceremony of the Latin Bitcoin conference (LaBitConf) in November 2021. Photograph: Marvin Recinos/AFP/Getty Images*

"If Bukele dreamed that he could create a different and innovative political economy, against the advice of the IMF, that dream has failed," said Luis Membraño, a Salvadoran economist. "There are no easy alternatives, no short-cuts."

The bitcoin losses are relatively insignificant to the overall debt, but the president's determination to mock advice from the IMF to backtrack on his bitcoin policy has spooked international markets. When the ratings agency Moody's announced a January downgrade in the country's credit, Bukele tweeted: "Breaking: El Salvador DGAF", an acronym of "don't give a fuck". Now Fitch says that some form of default is likely in January.

With inflation rising, a recession looming and the fiscal situation worsening, El Salvador cannot turn on the printing press because the country adopted the US dollar as national currency in 2001. Instead the government has dipped into its reserves to cover its fiscal hole. If the situation deteriorates, the country could eventually be forced to move off the dollar, according to Membreño.

However, to accept debt financing from China would signify a definitive break from the US and move the country closer China, Russia and Turkey, according to Membreño. "It would represent a total realignment of El Salvadoran foreign policy," he said.

That financing wouldn't come cheap, according to Evan Ellis, a senior associate at the Washington DC based Centre for Strategic & International Studies. "China acts as a payday lender, they make good money off of these deals," he said. "But they often find a way to tie the loans to long-term commercial and strategic benefits opening the way for Chinese companies."

Since El Salvador ended its relationship with Taiwan in 2018, China has agreed to build a stadium and a library in the country but its plans to convert the port of La Unión into a logistics hub have stalled.

Closer ties to China could also suit Bukele's own ambition. He has attracted criticism from the US and Europe for seeking re-election in 2024 in contravention of the country's constitution.

"When populist governments, of the left or right, come to power, China acts as a non-judgmental underwriter," said Ellis. "China can give Bukele financial independence to be authoritarian and ride roughshod over the constitution."

With an approval rating around 90%, Bukele remains the most popular president in Latin America, based on a heavy-handed approach to law and order and regular attacks on the old political elite.

When Salvadorans elected him in 2019, following decades of corruption from the traditional parties and spiraling gang crime, many felt they were in the last-chance saloon.

But as a bitcoin gambler, Bukele has known neither when to hold them nor when to fold them. Closer ties to China would represent yet another roll of the dice.

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Iranian security forces shoot dead at least two demonstrators

Agence France-Presse

Iranian security forces have shot dead at least two protesters, as demonstrations sparked by Mahsa Amini's death swelled on the anniversary of a bloody 2019 crackdown.

The protesters were responding to a call to commemorate those slain in the 2019 crackdown, giving new momentum to the demonstrations sparked by the death of 22-year-old Amini in mid-September this year, after her arrest for allegedly flouting Iran's strict dress code for women.

In Tehran, the din of honking car horns reverberated as protesters blocked a main roundabout at Sanat Square and yelled "Freedom, freedom", according to verified footage.

People later poured on to the streets of other cities, including Bandar Abbas and Shiraz, where women were seen waving their headscarves above their heads.

As darkness fell, more people emerged on to the streets of the capital, some of them gathering around bonfires and chanting "Death to the dictator", according to the 1500tasvir social media monitor.

"The government forces have directly opened fire in most of the cities where uprisings have taken place, such as Sanandaj, Kamyaran and Kermanshah," Hengaw, a rights group based in Norway, told AFP.



▲ *Protesters blocking traffic in the Iranian capital Tehran. Photograph: UGC/AFP/Getty Images*

"Two people have been killed by direct fire from government forces in Sanandaj and Kamyaran," it said, adding that it was trying to confirm reports that more protesters were killed.

The UN Human Rights Office called on Iran to immediately release thousands of people arrested for taking part in peaceful demonstrations.

"Instead of opening space for dialogue on legitimate grievances, the authorities are responding to unprecedented protests with increasing harshness," spokesperson Jeremy Laurence told reporters in Geneva.

"This year is the year of blood, Seyed Ali will be toppled," a large crowd chanted outside a Tehran metro station, in a video verified by AFP, referring to Iran's supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei.

Workers downed tools and university students boycotted classes in Amini's home province of Kurdistan, in western Iran, Hengaw said.

In the province's flashpoint city of Sanandaj, protesters were seen burning tyres in a street and chanting anti-government slogans, in other online footage.

"Woman, life, freedom" and "Man, homeland, prosperity", chanted male and female students at Islamic Azad University in the northwestern city of Tabriz, in a video published by 1500tasvir.

The protests on Tuesday marked the third anniversary of the start of "Bloody Aban" – or Bloody November – when a surprise overnight fuel price hike sparked bloody street violence that lasted for days.

Amnesty International said at least 304 people were killed during the protests three years ago, but a tribunal in London this year by various rights groups said expert evidence suggested the toll was likely far more, possibly as high as 1,515.

Oslo-based group Iran Human Rights said on Saturday that security forces had killed at least 326 people, including 43 children and 25 women, in the crackdown against ongoing protests.

The unrest was fanned by fury over the dress rules for women, but has grown into a broad movement against the theocracy that has ruled Iran since the 1979 Islamic Revolution.

It has shown no sign of abating despite the authorities' use of lethal force and a campaign of mass arrests that has snared activists, journalists and lawyers.

Former president and leading reformist Mohammad Khatami rejected the idea of a change of power in the Islamic republic, while admitting there was dissatisfaction with the current government.

"The overthrow [of the system] is neither possible nor desirable but the continuation of the current situation leads to social collapse," Khatami, president from 1997 to 2005, was quoted as saying by reformist newspapers.

Germans turning 18 to be offered €200 culture pass 'birthday present'

Kate Connolly in Berlin, Sam Jones in Madrid, Jon Henley in Paris and Angela Giuffrida in Rome

Young Germans are to join other Europeans in being offered a voucher to spend on their choice of cultural offerings under a scheme launched by the government.

The €200 *Kulturpass*, whichwill be made available to all 18-year-olds, has twin aims: to encourage young adults to experience live culture and drop stay-at-home pandemic habits; and give a financial boost to the arts scene, which has yet to recover from repeated lockdowns.

Germany's culture minister, Claudia Roth, described the cultural passport as the "equivalent of a birthday present" for the 750,000 people who will turn 18 in 2023. It will bring the EU's most populous country in line with France, Italy and Spain, which have introduced similar schemes.

The finance minister, Christian Lindner, described the pass as "cultural start-up capital" that its recipients can use within a two-year period for everything from books or music. It will be managed via an app and a website that provides a direct connection to a virtual market-



▲ *Dancers from the Berlin State Ballet during the dress rehearsal for a production of Don Quixote in Berlin last December. Photograph: Fabrizio Bensch/Reuters*

place of everything from bookshops to theatres.

The estimated cost to the German state is about €100m , in addition to the country's annual €2.3bn cultural budget.

Particular emphasis is being put on live culture, with theatres and concert venues expected to use the scheme to recruit new audience members as they compete for the revenue.

Online platforms such as Amazon and Spotify have been excluded from the scheme, which places an emphasis on smaller, often local organisations, such as independent cinemas and bookshops. Individual purchases will be limited in value to prevent someone from using the voucher to buy, for example, a single concert ticket for €200.

Launching the *Kulturpass*, Roth and Lindner said that if successful, the scheme would be extended and probably rolled out to a wider age group, possibly from the age of 15 upwards.

A similar scheme, announced last year by Spain's Socialist-led coalition government, offers young people a €400 culture voucher when they reach 18. According to the Spanish government, 57.6% of all those who turned 18 in 2022 registered for the voucher scheme in its first year.

France's Pass Culture, or youth culture pass, a promise from President Emmanuel Macron's 2017 election campaign, was trialled across the country the following year and – after a lengthy delay due to the pandemic – officially launched in 2021.

The app-based pass gives every 18-year-old €300 to spend on cinema, museum, theatre and concert tickets, as well as on books, art materials, arts courses, musical instruments or a subscription to a French digital platform such as Canal Plus, Salto or, for music, Deezer.

This year the €200m-a-year scheme was extended to over-15s, in two parts: a collective allowance of (depending on age) €25-30 per pupil per year available to teachers for class visits to exhibitions, films, plays, concerts or workshops, plus from €20-30 that each teenager can spend individually.In 2016, Italy introduced a "culture bonus" of €500 for every 18-year-old under prime minister, Matteo Renzi, It has been maintained by the culture ministry de-

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spite various changes of government since then and an attempt by populist leaders to scrap it in 2018.

83% of those who took it up have spent the money on books followed by music products and concert tickets, according to the culture ministry.

Roth said the German pass would open up a range of cultural opportunities for young people comparable with the Interrail Pass, a train ticket that has allowed generations of Europeans the opportunity to travel cheaply around the continent.

Olaf Zimmermann, the chairman of the German Cultural Council, an umbrella organisation representing more than 200 cultural associations, said the voucher was a "meaningful way to support both young people and the world of culture which have suffered in particular from the pandemic". But he said that establishing what young adults would be able to spend it on was "likely to be complicated" and should cover as many areas as possible, from drawing classes to the purchase of a musical instrument.

He urged the culture ministry to make its guidelines clear soon, "to ensure this really is a birthday present for soon-to-be 18 year olds".

Hand of Irulegi: ancient Spanish artefact could help trace origins of Basque language

Sam Jones in Madrid

More than 2,000 years after it was probably hung from the door of a mud-brick house in northern Spain to bring luck, a flat, lifesize bronze hand engraved with dozens of strange symbols could help scholars trace the development of one of the world's most mysterious languages.

Although the piece – known as the Hand of Irulegi – was discovered last year by archaeologists from the Aranzadi Science Society who have been digging near the city of Pamplona since 2017, its importance has only recently become clear.

Experts studying the hand and its inscriptions now believe it to be both the oldest written example of Proto-Basque and a find that "upends" much of what was previously known about the Vascones, a late iron age tribe who inhabited parts of northern Spain before the arrival of the Romans, and whose language is thought to have been an ancestor of modern-day Basque, or *euskera*.

Until now, scholars had supposed the Vascones had no proper written language – save for words found on coins – and only began writing after the Romans introduced the Latin alphabet. But the five words written in 40 characters identified as Vasconic, suggest otherwise.

The first – and only word – to be identified so far is *sorioneku*, a forerunner of the modern Basque word *zorioneko,*meaning good luck or good omen.

Javier Velaza, a professor of Latin philology at the University of Barcelona and one of the experts who deciphered the hand, said the discovery had finally confirmed the existence of a written Vasconic language.

"People spoke the language of the Vascones in the area where the inscriptions were found," he said.

"We had imagined that to be the case but until now, we had hardly any texts to bear that out. Now we do – and we also know that the Vascones used writing to set down their language … This inscription is incontrovertible; the first word of the text is patently a word that's found in modern Basque."

Velaza's colleague Joaquín Gorrochategui, a professor of Indo-European linguistics at the University of the Basque country, said the hand's secrets would change the way scholars looked at the Vascones.

"This piece upends how we'd thought about the Vascones and writing until now," he said. "We were almost convinced that the ancient Vascones were illiterate and didn't use writing except when it came to minting coins."

According to Mattin Aiestaran, the director of the Irulegi dig, the site owes its survival to the fact that the original village was burned and then abandoned during the Sertorian war between two rival Roman factions in the first century BC. The objects they left behind were buried in the ruins of their mud-brick houses.

"That's a bit of luck for archeologists and it means we have a snapshot of the moment of the attack," said Aiestaran. "That means we've been able to recover a lot of day-to-day material from people's everyday lives. It's an exceptional situation and one that has allowed us to find an exceptional piece."

Despite the excitement surrounding the deciphering of the inscription, Velaza counselled calm study rather than giddy conjecture. After all, he added, the hand hails from one particular moment in time and tells us only that the people in the area then spoke and wrote the Vasconic language.

"That doesn't mean we know how long they'd been there, nor what their future was after that moment," he said.

"It's true that this is an extraordinarily important text but I'd urge a bit of caution about using it to extrapolate too many conclusions about what happened afterwards. But linguistically speaking, it's going to provide linguists who specialise in the Vasconic language and Proto-Basque with something they haven't had until now."

He added: "I think we should be excited – but we should still be very rigorous scientifically speaking."

Not every recent Basque language discovery has lived up to its billing. Two years ago, a Spanish archaeologist was found guilty of faking finds that included pieces of third-century pottery engraved with one of the first depictions of the crucified Christ, Egyptian hieroglyphics, and Basque words that predated the earliest known written examples of the language by 600 years.

Although the archaeologist, Eliseo Gil, claimed the pieces would "rewrite the history books", an expert committee examined them and found traces of modern glue as well as references to the 17th-century French philosopher René Descartes.



▲ *The Hand of Irulegi was discovered last year near Pamplona. Photograph: Navarra government/AFP/Getty*

Chaotic scenes in southern Chinese city as Covid curbs fuel unrest

Verna Yu

Crowds in the southern Chinese metropolis of Guangzhou have crashed through lockdown barriers and marched on to streets in a rare outburst of public anger about Covid restrictions days after the Chinese government announced that it was easing them.

According to videos widely shared on Twitter, hundreds cheered as they charged through the streets in Haizhu district in chaotic scenes in south-western Guangzhou on Monday night. In one piece of footage, protesters overturned a police car.

Local police declined to comment when contacted by the Guardian. "I cannot answer your question," a staff member at the Datang police station in Haizhu district said on Tuesday.

Guangzhou, home to nearly 19 million people, has been the centre of Covid outbreaks in China, with the number of cases surging in recent days. Daily infections of Covid-19 in the city have topped 5,000 for the first time, leading to speculation that localised lockdowns could widen.

Tensions had been mounting in Haizhu district – home to dozens of wholesale textile markets and thousands of small businesses that employ tens of thousands of migrant workers from elsewhere in China – after the authorities placed it under lockdown this month. The restrictions came as workers scrambled to meet production goals to guarantee supplies for an online shopping festival on 11 November.

Before public anger boiled over on Monday night, residents and business owners had been skirting government curbs by venturing outside their locked down districts and smuggling their goods out, according to an official at the Guangzhou health commission early this month, who denounced the illegal activities.

Radio Free Asia reported that disgruntled workers also protested in several nearby industrial hubs, including Kangle, also in Haizhu district, and Tangxia, in Tianhe district.

A number of posts on China's social media platform Weibo blamed the protesters, who were mainly migrant workers from Hubei province, for the "rioting", but one user noted that the arbitrary lockdowns of residences and the barring of migrant workers from re-

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turning home in the protracted Covid restrictions over almost three years were "driving people mad" and said some workers had killed themselves.

Last month, a Covid outbreak at a Foxconn factory that makes Apple iPhones in Zhengzhou, central China, prompted a large number of workers to flee and slowed iPhone production.

On Tuesday, China reported 17,772 new local Covid-19 infections for 14 November, up from 16,072 a day earlier and the most since April. The Guangzhou health commission reported 5,124 Covid-19 cases as of Monday, of which 4,977 were asymptomatic. Officials also said on Tuesday that they plan more temporary hospitals in addition to the six that have been built that have 20,000 beds, mainly for observation of infected people without symptoms.

The chaos in Guangzhou was the latest outburst of frustration over restrictions that have involved frequent lockdowns and enforced quarantines under China's "dynamic zero Covid" policy, which the authorities say has saved lives. Many cities have scaled back routine testing after the government announced measures last Friday to lift some of the rules to alleviate economic pressures and cool public discontent.

The Guangzhou health commission said in a news conference on Monday that the authorities were ending lockdowns in many districts as cases were being brought under control. A spokesperson said public transport, industrial production and ordinary life in many districts in Guangzhou, including Haizhu, were resuming. However, she also said the infection was still continuing and a number of districts, including Haizhu, would continue to strengthen pandemic control measures.

The Communist party's mouthpiece People's Daily on Tuesday reiterated that the "dynamic zero Covid" policy was to be "unswervingly implemented", saying the "enhancement" announced last Friday was to fine-tune measures to fight against the pandemic, and not an indication of relaxation.

Under the new rules, testing efforts are to be more targeted, easing a financial burden on cities. On Monday, Beijing's most populous district of Chaoyang moved some testing sites closer to residential compounds. While that increased the number of sites, it also led to long waiting times for many, fuelling frustration as many workplaces require negative test results within 24 hours.

Additional reporting by Reuters

Climate activists throw black liquid at Gustav Klimt painting in Vienna

Associated Press in Berlin

Climate activists in Austria have attacked a painting by Gustav Klimt, with one throwing a black, oily liquid at it and another gluing himself to the glass covering the painting.

Members of *Letzte Generation Österreich* (Last Generation Austria) tweeted that they had targeted the 1915 painting Death and Life at the Leopold Museum in Vienna to protest against their government's use of fossil fuels.

After throwing the liquid at the artwork, which was not damaged, one activist was pushed away by a museum guard while another glued his hand to the glass over the painting.

The group said they were protesting against "oil and gas drilling", which they called "a death sentence to society".

In a video of the incident, which the group posted online, one of the activists can be heard shouting: "We have known about the problem for 50 years – we must finally act, otherwise the planet will be broken."

After the attack, police arrived at the museum and the black liquid, which the activists had brought in in a hot water bottle under their clothes, was cleaned off the protective glass, the Austria Press Agency reported.

The museum's restoration team said later that while the painting itself had not been harmed, the damage to the glass and security framing, as well as to the wall and floor, was "evident and significant".

Hans-Peter Wipplinger, the director of the museum, told the news agency that the concerns of the climate activists were justified, "but attacking works of art is definitely the wrong way to implement the targeted goal of preventing the predicted climate collapse". He appealed to the group to find other ways to make their concerns known.

Austria's culture minister also expressed understanding for "the concerns and also the desperation" of the activists, but criticised their form of protest.

"I do not believe that actions like these are purposeful, because the question arises whether they do not rather lead to more lack of understanding than to more awareness of the climate catastrophe," Andrea Mayer said. "From my point of view, accepting the risk of irrevocable damage to works of art is the wrong way to go. Art and culture are allies in the fight against climate catastrophe, not adversaries."

The Klimt work is an oil on canvas painting in the Art Nouveau style depicting death on the left side and a group of partially naked, hugging people on the right. It's one of the latest pieces of art to be targeted by climate activists in recent months.

In Germany, mashed potatoes were thrown at a Claude Monet painting, while the British group Just Stop Oil threw tomato soup at Vincent van Gogh's Sunflowers in London's National Gallery last month.

Activists also glued themselves to John Constable's The Hay Wain in the National Gallery, and to the frame of an early copy of Leonardo da Vinci's The Last Supper at London's Royal Academy of Arts.

Dutch to ban laughing gas over fears for health and road safety

Jennifer Rankin in Brussels

The Dutch government will ban laughing gas from next year, amid growing concern about the risks it poses to health and road safety.

From 1 January 2023, the sale, import and possession of laughing gas, formally known as nitrous oxide, will be banned in the Netherlands, with a few exceptions for medical use and the food industry.

The Dutch state secretary for health, welfare and sport, Maarten Van Ooijen, said the recreational use of laughing gas posed "enormous health risks" and was linked to "terrible" road accidents involving non-users of the drug, as he announced the ban on Monday.

Nitrous oxide, which is inhaled from a balloon that has been filled by a cylinder, has become increasingly common as a recreational drug. One in 50 Dutch adults used laughing gas in 2020, according to the Trimbos Institute, which studies drugs and mental health. The institute also highlighted the growing use of the substance by 12- to 14-year-olds, who do not see it as a "real drug" and are unaware of the risks.



▲ *Discarded nitrous oxide containers. The Dutch ban will allow exceptions for medical use and the food industry. Photograph: Niall Carson/PA*

For some experts, January may be too late. "The nitrous oxide ban should come into effect as soon as possible, rather yesterday than today," Robert Riezebos, a cardiologist at the Greater Amsterdam city hospital, told the newspaper Het Parool in May.

He reported seeing 20 young patients in his department in recent years suffering major health damage, such as heart attacks and pulmonary embolisms, as well as a young woman who had to have her leg amputated.

Police have also welcomed the ban, after a surge in traffic accidents linked to the drug. In a nearly-three-year period until October 2021 there were almost 1,800 road accidents involving nitrous oxide, including 63 fatal collisions, according to a police survey reported by the Dutch public broadcaster NOS. Offences committed by people using the gas included dangerous driving and driving without a licence.

The ban had already been approved by the Dutch house of representatives and the senate, but the council of state, an official advisory body, wanted clearer legal distinctions between medical and recreational use. Laughing gas is used as an anaesthetic, as well as in the production of whipped cream.

But one prominent industry group opposed the ban. The Industry Association for Responsible Laughing Gas Suppliers acknowledged there was a problem, but argued that stricter rules would "work better than a ban".

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Paris Olympic and Paralympic Games mascots likened to 'clitoris in trainers'

Angelique Chrisafis in Paris

France's mascots for the 2024 Olympic Games have been likened to a giant "clitoris in trainers", with the French newspaper Libération hailing it as a revolutionary departure from the traditional phallic symbol of the Eiffel Tower.

When the two triangular red mascots, the Phryges, were unveiled for the Olympic and Paralympic Games, they were presented as the shape of Phrygian caps, the floppy, conical hats associated with the French Revolution.

The Paris organising committee said it was an opportunity to "embody the French spirit by offering something new" in a break from the traditional animal figure often chosen for the Olympics.

But the little red figures have swiftly been likened to clitorises with smiley faces. They bear a notable resemblance to the giant inflatable, red clitoris put up opposite the Eiffel Tower on last year's International Women's Day by a feminist group campaigning for more education and scientific research on the organ whose sole function is the female orgasm.



▲ *Members of Gang du Clito carrying the 5-metre-high inflatable clitoris to mark International Women's Day at Human Rights Plaza on 8 March 2021. Photograph: Stefano Rellandini/AFP/Getty Images*

In an opinion piece in Libération, the journalist Quentin Girard celebrated the fact that the floppy tip of the mascots' hat was actually being seen as a clitoris glans.

He said "from an anatomical point of view", having a clitoris as the French Olympic mascot was "very good news" and meant that after years of taboo and lack of education, the country had collectively "at last understood what one looks like".

And, he added, "from a political point of view, it's not a bad thing that Paris lets go of its eternal phallic Eiffel Tower" in favour of a clitoris, a new representation of the French capital that is "revolutionary and feminist".

But in the inevitable social media debate around the clitoris-shaped mascots, one secondary school teacher said their simplistic triangular design could reinforce society's vague notion of the under-discussed part of the female anatomy, suggesting biology teachers be brought in to redesign them.

Julia Pietri, a feminist writer and publisher who led a street-art campaign for more eduction on the clitoris, said of the Paris mascot comparisons: "I find it amusing because I campaigned for a long time to raise awareness of the anatomy of the clitoris, and four years ago when we launched, few people could recognise a clitoris. So today I'm happy and rejoicing that, thanks to all that's happened in feminism, people can at least recognise the clitoris. It shows it's now in popular culture and that's a win."

Sam Bankman-Fried was hailed as a crypto wonder child. What happened?

David Gerard

Last Tuesday, FTX, the second-largest cryptocurrency exchange in the world, closed withdrawals, blaming "severe liquidity problems". By Friday, FTX had filed for bankruptcy.

After a stupendously profitable asset bubble in 2021, the cryptocurrency industry suffered harsh reversals in 2022. A string of high-profile collapses – Terra-Luna, Three Arrows Capital, Celsius Network, Voyager Digital – lost investors a fortune, tanked prices and demolished market confidence. But FTX's sudden collapse caught almost everyone by surprise.

FTX was founded in 2019 by Sam Bankman-Fried, the child of two Stanford academics. He had worked at quantitative trading firm Jane Street Teuntil 2017, when he struck out on his own with his Alameda Research crypto hedge fund. With Alameda as its market maker, FTX rapidly became one of the most popular crypto exchanges. Traders loved its complex futures and options products. A more restricted branch for US customers, FTX US, opened in 2020.

When bitcoin and crypto-assets hit the headlines in 2021, Bankman-Fried positioned himself as a billionaire public intellectual. Bankman-Fried would only be photographed in shorts, a T-shirt or hoodie, and untied shoes. He marketed himself to venture capitalists as a genius eccentric, beyond their comprehension. How did this mere boy of 29 hit the heights so quickly? What was his secret?



▲ *'Bankman-Fried's secret turned out to be a financial shell game.' Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images*

FTX marketed hard to the US public: a Super Bowl ad, sports sponsorships, even ads in fortune cookies. Bankman-Fried spent tens of millions on candidates for the US midterms. He even went to Washington, promoting his vision of crypto regulation, to create an environment where he could market FTX to large institutional investors – though this rankled others in the crypto industry, who felt that FTX was trying to freeze them out.

FTX worked hard to promote itself as a trustworthy financial institution run by a dynamic genius, in the mold of Steve Jobs or Elon Musk. In fact, the institution was operating outside all effective regulation, and was an all but hollow shell after the collapse of the crypto market. The Forbes billionaire list entry for Bankman-Fried warned that most of his fortune was "half of FTX and a share of its FTT tokens".

FTT was an internal token created for traders on FTX – very like supermarket loyalty card points. But FTT was also a crypto-asset, traded outside FTX. It had a mark-to-market value, and people traded against it – such as Bankman-Fried's other company, Alameda. On 2 November, an Alameda balance sheet was leaked showing that its claimed assets were substantially composed of FTT tokens. Alameda had borrowed from other crypto companies using this pile of FTX-Alameda loyalty card points. It had the FTT because FTX had needed to bail out Alameda after the collapse of Terra-Luna, and sent over its own made-up FTT tokens, claiming these were assets of value.

The crypto markets assumed that trouble at Alameda meant trouble at FTX, and customers got their cryptos out as fast as they could. FTX closed withdrawals on Tuesday. FTX's competitor Binance announced a bailout a few hours later, but this offer was withdrawn the next day: Binance had looked at FTX's books and seen that at least $6bn was missing. The Bahamas, where FTX is incorporated, froze FTX's assets on Thursday; the next day, FTX filed for Chapter 11 bankruptcy in the US.

The celebrity billionaire is a perennial favorite in the US. The archetype is Jobs: eccentric, acerbic, prickly, and spent 10 years solidly delivering through the late 1990s and into the 2000s. Musk put himself forward similarly, promoting electric cars and energy transition.

When the ultra-wealthy seek the limelight, it's a stage-managed production for publicity purposes. Sometimes it's a Steve Jobs. Sometimes it's an Elizabeth Holmes, dazzling the business world with charm while promoting a fraud.

Bankman-Fried promoted himself as an eccentric genius with financial acumen beyond normal minds, and policy insight to take this new asset class into the future. In reality, his image was a distraction from what was going on inside FTX: an ever-widening balance sheet hole, as FTX and Alameda, working together as a shadow bank, tried to plug the hole with customer funds. Bankman-Fried's secret turned out to be a financial shell game.

The wider issue is that crypto is all but unregulatable. Legislators can pass lots of detailed rules for US entities, but all the trading in crypto happens in opaque and unregulated offshore casinos – such as FTX.

Further frauds will reveal themselves. When crypto goes out of fashion, new financial shenanigans will step up – fronted by an eccentric genius who nobody understands, but assume they must be as good as they say they

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are.

Stories of billionaire wonder children always seem too good to be true. That's because they are.

David Gerard is the author of Attack of the 50 Foot Blockchain (2017) and Libra Shrugged (2020). He writes the cryptocurrency and blockchain news site Attack of the 50 Foot Blockchain

Are US politics starting to turn towards a more hopeful future?

Gary Gerstle

Last week was amazing for Joe Biden. The Red Wave fizzled. The Democrats kept the Senate. Even if the House slips from the Democrats' grasp, as it is expected to, Biden will be credited with engineering the strongest midterm showing by an incumbent president's party since 2002, and the most impressive such performance by a sitting Democratic president since JFK in 1962. Women's anger at the supreme court's Dobbs decision hammered the Republicans in key states. Many of Trump's highest-flying, election-denying candidates fell to earth, damaging the ex-president's aura of invincibility. Fights and recriminations have now broken out everywhere in Republican ranks.

And there's more from last week to bring a smile to Biden's face: inflation moderated, the Dow rocketed skyward, and Ukrainians pushed the Russians out of Kherson, a big win not just for Ukraine but for Biden's European foreign policy. And, oh yes, in America, young people – the country's future – came out in relatively large numbers and, in critical contests, broke for the Democrats in a big way.

And yet, what did this past week of exceptional political success yield for Biden and Democrats? Their majority in the Senate is still razor-thin. If they lose the House, their already narrow path to passing legislation will shrink further. House Republicans are likely to use a new House majority to flood media with an investigation of Hunter Biden and other vulnerable Democratic party figures – payback for the January 6 hearings. Even the most impressively conceived legislative proposals coming from the White House may be greeted with House Republican intransigence.

Nevertheless, looking ahead to 2024, there are grounds for optimism, not just that Democrats can win but that they can begin to build bigger and more enduring majorities. Most importantly, three major legislative achievements of the Biden administration to date are likely to have a greater impact on the 2024 election than they did in 2022. The most important of these is the curiously titled Inflation Reduction Act. That bill has not gotten the credit it deserves, in part because of its silly name and in part because it is much smaller than the $5tn Build Back Bill from which it is descended.



▲ *'All this investment and building should yield lots of jobs and, perhaps, the promise of a better life for those long denied it.' Photograph: Ronda Churchill/AFP/Getty Images*

Watching that original bill get whittled down and carved up across 2021 and 2022 was not a pretty sight. Yet the final version of the legislation contains truly important initiatives in multiple spheres, nowhere more so than the nearly $400bn appropriated for investments in green technology and for tax breaks and subsidies to businesses and homeowners to convert to clean energy. The bill constitutes the biggest single investment that the federal government has made in a green energy future.

Of nearly equal importance in Biden's first two years were two other bills: the trillion-dollar Infrastructure Investment and Jobs Act, to improve the nation's crumbling physical infrastructure; and the Chips Act, to reshore, in a massive way, the research, design and production of semi-conductor computer chips, those tiny, ubiquitous and indispensable components that drive every computer and virtually all of America's (and the world's) machines and phones.

In these three initiatives, the Democrats have laid down a foundation for a program of political economy that diverges significantly from its neoliberal predecessor. This older vision of political economy, long embraced both by Republicans and Democrats, insisted on freeing markets and capital from government oversight and direction. The Biden program, by contrast, is grounded in the belief that a strong government is necessary to steer – and, in some cases, compel – markets and corporations into serving the public good. It crystallized from the extensive discussions between the Joe Biden and Bernie Sanders wings of the Democratic party across 2020 and 2021. It represents a profound departure from the last 30 of governing practice.

The industrial policies being promoted by the Biden administration won't lead to nationalization; they focus instead on incentivizing the private sector to pursue broadly agreed upon economic aims. Two of the three aforementioned bills – the Chips Act and the Infrastructure Act – passed the Senate with significant Republican support. Quietly, Biden has delivered on his promise to open a new pathway to bipartisanship. There will be opportunities to broaden this bipartisanship, especially in regard to breaking up or regulating the monopoly power of the giant social media companies. Strong support for doing so exists on both sides of the Senate aisle. One key question is whether this incipient senatorial cross-party collaboration can soften the country's paralyzing political polarization and persuade a few House Republicans to support upper chamber initiatives. Another is whether the Democrats can use their new program of political economy to sell a broad swath of the electorate – including constituencies currently lying beyond Democratic redoubts – on the party's vision of the good life.

Judging by the midterms' voting patterns alone, one might be tempted to say no. But there are reasons to think otherwise. For one, economic circumstances will be different in 2024 than they are now. Inflation will probably have moderated and thus may have faded as a political flashpoint. The recession that the Fed seems so determined to trigger will have occurred, and a recovery will be under way. Additionally, by 2024, corporate America (as a result of the Inflation Reduction Act) will be more deeply invested in green technology. The conversion to post-fossil fuel economy will have correspondingly accelerated, as America's robust private sector glimpses the profits to be made in the clean energy revolution. Moreover, by 2024, the first new infrastructural projects should be nearing completion, yielding visible improvements in America's creaking system of bridges, roads, and transportation hubs and networks. All this investment and building should generate jobs and, perhaps, the promise of a better life for many long denied it. A somnolent US labor movement is reawakening, a development that, if it continues, will help to ensure that future jobs carry with them decent wages. Perhaps word will spread that Democrats are capable of managing America's dynamic but unruly economy in the public interest.

Is this too rosy a picture? Perhaps. Biden will never be a "great communicator". Trump's shrinking but still ardent band of zealots will continue to threaten American democracy. The red state-blue state divide endures. House Republicans together with the US supreme court may obstruct further Democratic efforts at reform. And we don't know what a desperate Putin might inflict on the world if he truly believed that his reign over Russia was about to end.

If we take the long view, however, and concede that a progressive political order requires a long march, then we might one day look back on this midterm – and on Biden's first two years – and discern in them the first steps toward a better future.

Gary Gerstle is Mellon professor of American history emeritus at Cambridge and a Guardian US columnist. His most recent book is The Rise and Fall of the Neoliberal Order: America and the World in the Free Market Era (2022)

All hail Jeff Bezos the philanthropist! The rest of us will just keep paying our taxes

Marina Hyde

How bracing to wake up yesterday and read that Amazon founder Jeff Bezos had donated $100m to Dolly Parton's charitable endeavours, at his own "Courage and Civility" event. (Sarcastic air-quotes: my own.) The many, many news reports about this act suggested it was a truly incredible sum from the second richest man in the world, who – according to recent estimates – gets richer by about $205m a day.

Anyway, once I'd peeled myself off the ceiling, I got busy on the government's tax calculator. If you're on the median average UK salary – and you pay your taxes – your take-home pay is £72 a day. Looked at one way, then, Jeff's benevolence would be the equivalent of donating £34.56 to charity. Have YOU ever donated thirty-four quid to charity? Do you pay your taxes? If so, you're actually being *more generous than Jeff Bezos,*who, famously, avoids almost all of his. And yet, where's YOUR splashy news write-up in all the fine news outlets of the world? Where's YOUR fawning TV interview? Why does no one refer to YOU as a "philanthropist"?

We'll come to the obvious answers to those questions shortly, but for now, let's look at the stage-managed hoopla around these so-called Courage and Civility awards. And yes, that title does make it sound like Jeff just demanded a warehouse operative bring him two inoffensive abstract nouns that were out of copyright. In fact, Bezos announced the initiative last year, shortly after disembarking his little space rocket, possibly sensing a planetary disdain being levelled at the kind of guy who could put himself in zero gravity for four minutes but couldn't figure out

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how to treat his workers properly.

Anyway, the Courage and Civility awards are now an actual thing. And alongside Sunday's self-effacing ceremony and his attempt to piggyback on the lifelong altruism and extraordinary charitable service of HRH Dolly Parton, Bezos granted an exclusive sit-down with CNN. First impressions? Jeff interviews like a chat tool, and resembles your local area's most uncompromising and least booked 58-year-old Vin Diesel lookalike. Having long refused to sign the Giving Pledge – a promise by many of the world's richest individuals to donate most of their wealth to charitable causes – Bezos announced that he intends giving "the majority" of his money away in his lifetime, according to CNN. And yet, does he intend to do this? His answer – "Yeah, I do" – feels somewhat vague and short on specifics.

But taking Jeff at his word, I mean it from the bottom of the heart when I say: BIG FRICKING DEAL. Most people give a significant amount of their money away during their lifetime, via a little something we call the taxation system. I know! Where's our red-carpet gala? I tell you what, next time our paychecks arrive, why don't we all get our hair done and put on black tie or a big old dress and graciously twat our way down a red carpet going "You're MOST welcome!" for the cameras.



▲ *Jeff Bezos at the National Press Club in Washington, 2019. Photograph: Pablo Martínez Monsiváis/AP*

According to what Bezos told CNN, philanthropy "is really hard". It certainly seems to be for him. Do recall he was only dragged kicking and screaming to the giving-a-shit game, having spent years accruing billions before it was finally pointed out to him that not having some kind of philanthropic arm looked fairly abysmal. In 2017 Bezos asked Twitter users for ideas on how to help the world "in the here and now", before embarking on a truly committed programme of ignoring every single one of them who suggested paying his workers properly and contributing fair tax.

A year later, he actually uttered the words: "The only way that I can see to deploy this much financial resource is by converting my Amazon winnings into space travel." That was the same year Amazon helped kill a Seattle tax on big firms to alleviate the homelessness crisis, by threatening to pull a huge building project. The business and tech commentator Scott Galloway calls Bezos "the mother of all welfare queens" for the vast benefits he's drawn from public money and the tax breaks he remorselessly chases and demands.

But of course, Jeff is the kind of widely acclaimed visionary who simply lacks the vision to realise that the first way to help is by paying people a fair wage and forking out your taxes like an ordinary person – and not by turning up to dole out "charity" after the event like some bastard god of the purse strings. Unfortunately, he's part of that specific billionaire class that believes they should be allowed to hypothecate almost 100% of their own vast riches in whichever direction they wish, because the exchequers of the world are just junior personnel, and they know better than all of them how to spend it.

So yes, for Bezos philanthropy "is really hard". What *he* does – faux-lanthropy – is much, much easier. Moving billions to non-profits you control, effectively awarding yourself tax breaks, buying media fawning with one of the lamest possible sleights-of-hand: these things, self-evidently, are a whole lot easier. What's hard to understand is why on earth we're still buying into this obvious bullshit from some of the most selfish people in the world. The poor give a far greater proportion of their money to charity than the rich. I don't mean to be uncivil, but what is courageous about letting Jeff Bezos pretend otherwise?



▲ *Dolly Parton at the 2022 Rock & Roll Hall of Fame induction ceremony in Los Angeles, November 2022. Photograph: Christopher Polk/Variety/Getty Images*

Marina Hyde is a Guardian columnist

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Why were so many smart people so dumb about FTX? Did they seriously just like Sam Bankman-Fried's 'vibe'?

Arwa Mahdawi

Do you ever get the impression that the entire economy is an elaborate scheme and nobody in charge actually knows what the hell they're doing? I've been getting that feeling a lot lately. In just the past couple of weeks, we've been treated to the spectacle of Elon Musk dramatically running Twitter into the ground and the wild implosion of FTX.

If you haven't been following the FTX drama, a quick summary: in 2019 a twentysomething called Sam Bankman-Fried launched a cryptocurrency exchange that got people who get excited about that sort of thing very excited indeed. All of the big players in venture capital, including Sequoia Capital, whose early-stage investments include Apple, Google and YouTube, basically lined up to throw money at the kid. SBF (as he is sometimes known) was routinely described as the "next Warren Buffett" and predicted to be "the world's first trillionaire".

It seems, however, that FTX was doing some very dubious things: namely, furtively shifting customer funds to Alameda Research, a firm also operated by Bankman-Fried, which then gambled them away on risky trades. Instead of becoming the world's first trillionaire, SBF saw his net worth plummet from $16.2bn to about $3 overnight. Former US Treasury secretary Larry Summers has likened FTX's collapse to the Enron scandal, saying that from the reports, there were "whiffs of fraud" about it.



▲ *Sam Bankman-Fried, no longer predicted to be the world's first trillionaire. Photograph: Bloomberg/Getty Images*

SBF lost it all in style, mind you: he lived in a luxury compound in the Bahamas with nine of his employees. According to reports, "all 10 are, or used to be, paired up in romantic relationships with each other."

This would all be extremely amusing – the Fyre festival of finance – were it not for the fact that a lot of ordinary people stand to lose money because of FTX going bankrupt. The Ontario Teachers' Pension Plan, for example, invested $75m in FTX. Also unamusing is the fact that my bank apparently does more due diligence when I buy a sofa than Silicon Valley's most high-profile investors appear to have done before giving billions of dollars to a scruffy twentysomething who liked to nap on beanbags.

Why on earth did some of the supposedly smartest minds in venture capital give Bankman-Fried so much money and provide so little oversight? Two reasons, I think. The first is that nobody understood what on earth the guy was talking about and decided that that meant he was a genius. Secondly, they just liked his vibe.

"I don't know how I know, I just do. SBF is a winner," wrote Adam Fisher, a business journalist, in a glowing profile of Bankman-Fried that was published on Sequoia's website in September and yanked from it very recently. The same 13,000-word hagiography also reveals that SBF's big vision for FTX – the description that made all these fancy finance guys open their pockets – was that it would be a place where "you can do anything you want with your next dollar. You can buy bitcoin … You can buy a banana." SBF, by the way, delivered this amazing pitch while playing League of Legends in the meeting.

Was Sequoia annoyed that SBF was playing video games while asking them for money? Nah, they loved it. "We were incredibly impressed," one funder said, according to Fisher's profile. "It was one of those your-hair-is-blown-back type of meetings."

I don't know about you, but I'm having one of those want-to-tear-my-hair-out-with-frustration moments right now. Can you imagine a woman playing video games in a meeting and being handed billions by investors? That would never happen. Last year, female founders secured only 2% of venture capital in the US and I'll bet you everything I have that those founders were as buttoned-up as you can get. I'll bet you they didn't get a billion dollars because people "just liked their vibe".

I'll grant you that Elizabeth Holmes conned a lot of important people out of money, but she at least put a little effort into her meetings. Maybe it's time we stop fetishising tech founders and realise that being able to raise lots of money doesn't actually make you a genius.

● Arwa Mahdawi is a Guardian columnist

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It should not be controversial to say a population of 8 billion will have a grave impact on the climate

John Vidal

By a remarkable coincidence, just as governments, campaigners and business owners are meeting in Egypt to address climate breakdown today, the world is officially crashing past the symbolic 8 billion population milestone . This means global population is on its way to 10 billion or more by the turn of the century.

But there will be no attempt by countries at Cop27 to connect the inexorable growth of human numbers with the seemingly unstoppable rise in temperatures. Despite the fact that the several billion more people expected to be alive in 70 years' time will put more pressure on resources and will produce far more emissions, the population explosion is yet again being ignored, sidestepped or denied by world leaders.

Part of this is down to sensitivity about talking about human numbers. History is littered with violent governments trying to force sterilisation on vulnerable people. Suggestions, too, that human numbers be cut have often been peddled by authoritarian regimes and far-right extremists, and genuine concern today in rich countries is often met with accusations of racism or eco-fascism.

Yet as the scientist James Lovelock was fond of saying, anyone who failed to see the connection between climate and population was "either ignorant or hiding from the truth", adding: "These two huge environmental problems are inseparable and to discuss one while ignoring the other is irrational."



▲ *Nobel prizewinner Malala Yousafzai 'summed it up: 'If every girl was able to exercise her sexual and reproductive rights … it could reduce total emissions." Photograph: Spencer Platt/Getty*

Until now, the orthodox western intellectual argument has been that the number of people does not matter as much as how people use resources. Consumption and inequality are the problem, not population size. True, the wealthiest10%consume about 20 times more energy overall than the bottom 10%. So of course the rich must change their behaviour. But making climate breakdown all about consumption has become an excuse for countries to do nowhere near enough to reduce their populations.

The hard fact is that in an age of climate breakdown, human numbers matter. And the ecological impact of another 2-3 billion humans will be immense.

This is also about women's rights too. By ignoring population, the needs of women and girls are being sidelined by governments that are too obsessed with consumption to notice how vital education and family planning are in tackling the climate emergency.

The Nobel peace prizewinner Malala Yousafzai summed it up best last year. "When girls are educated and when they stay in schools they get married later in their lives, then they have less children and that helps us to reduce the impacts of climate change that the population increase brings," she said. "If every girl was able to exercise her sexual and reproductive health and rights through quality education and had access to modern contraception, it could reduce total emissions."

According to the UN population fund (UNFPA), 257 million women have an unmet need for proper contraception, half of all global pregnancies are unplanned, and nearly a quarter of all women do not have enough agency to refuse sex.

Yet the world's richest countries together contribute just a few hundred million dollars annually to the UN's population agency, with some now pushing "pro-natalist" policies to grow their numbers. In 2017, Donald Trump cut US funding to the UNFPA, and last year the UK followed, by cutting its contribution to the agency by 85%, from an expected $200m to a paltry $32m. US funding has since been partly restored but the British money alone, it has been estimated, would have helped to prevent the deaths of about 250,000 mothers and children, 14.6 million unintended pregnancies and 4.3 million unsafe abortions.

The generations-long argument between those who uniquely blame overpopulation and those who maintain that consumption is the biggest contribution to the climate emergency must be ditched.

Finally, and barely noticed, the Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change, the world's consensus of climate scientists, identified global population growth as one of the two biggest drivers of growing CO_2 emissions, saying earlier this year that "globally, GDP per capita and population growth remained the strongest drivers of CO_2 emissions from fossil fuel combustion in the last decade". It also warned that if population continues to grow, "it will be much harder to limit warming to 1.5C".

This should be proof enough for everyone that population growth and its future environmental impact are now twin global crises - and UN agencies and civil society groups meeting in Egypt must urgently recognise that both are driving planetary destruction, and poverty.

John Vidal was the Guardian's environment editor. He is the author of McLibel: Burger Culture on Trial

Do you have an opinion on the issues raised in this article? If you would like to submit a response of up to 300 words by email to be considered for publication in our letters section, please click here.

The Guardian view on Cop27: this is no time for apathy or complacency

Editorial

Climate change is a global problem that requires cooperation between all nations. That's why today more than 30 newspapers and media organisations in more than 20 countries have taken a common view about what needs to be done. Time is running out. Rather than getting out of fossil fuels and into clean energy, many wealthy nations are reinvesting in oil and gas, failing to cut emissions fast enough and haggling over the aid they are prepared to send to poor countries. All this while the planet hurtles towards the point of no return - where climate chaos becomes irreversible.

Since the Cop26 UN climate summit in Glasgow 12 months ago, countries have only promised to do one-fiftieth of



▲ *Cop27 participants walk past a climate mural in the conference's Youth and Children Pavilion in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt. Photograph: Mohammed Abed/AFP/Getty*

what is needed to stay on track to keep temperatures within 1.5C of pre-industrial levels. No continent has avoided extreme weather disasters this year - from floods in Pakistan to heatwaves in Europe, and from forest fires in Australia to hurricanes in the US. Given that these came about from elevated temperatures of about 1.1C, the world can expect far worse to come.

As many nations seek to reduce their reliance on Russia, the world is experiencing a "gold rush" for new fossil fuel projects. These are cast as temporary supply measures, but they risk locking the planet into irreversible damage. All this underlines that humanity has to end its addiction to fossil fuels. If renewable energy was the norm there would be no climate emergency.

The world's poorest people will bear the brunt of the destruction wreaked by drought, melting ice sheets and crop failures. To shield these groups from the loss of life and livelihoods will require money. Developing countries, says one influential report, need $2tn annually to cut their greenhouse gas emissions and cope with climate breakdown.

Rich countries account for just one in eight people in the world today but are responsible for half of greenhouse gases. These nations have a clear moral responsibility to help. Developing nations should be given enough cash to address the dangerous conditions they did little to create - especially as a global recession looms.

Rich nations should deliver on the promise of previously committed funds - such as the $100bn a year from 2020 - to signal their seriousness. As a bare minimum, a windfall tax on the combined profits of the largest oil and gas companies - estimated at almost $100bn in the first three months of the year - needs to be enacted. The United Nations was right to call for the cash to be used to support the most vulnerable. But such a levy would only be the start. Poor nations also carry debts that make it impossible to recover after climate-related disasters or protect themselves from future ones. Creditors should be generous in writing off loans for those on the frontline of the climate emer-

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gency.

These measures need not wait for coordinated international action. Countries could implement them on regional or national levels. A nation's cumulative emissions must be the basis of its responsibility to act. While private finance can help, the onus is on big historical emitters to stump up the money.

Solving the crisis is the moonshot of our times. Getting to the moon succeeded within a decade because huge resources were devoted to it. A similar commitment is needed now. But an economic crisis has reduced rich countries' appetite for spending and the planet risks being trapped in fossil-fuel dependence by a rearguard action of big business. Yet during the pandemic, central banks across the world lubricated states' expenditure by buying up their own governments' bonds. The trillions of dollars needed to deal with the ecological emergency demand such radical thinking returns.

This is no time for apathy or complacency; the urgency of the moment is upon us. The UN Framework Convention on Climate Change must be about the power of argument not the argument of power. Key to maintaining the consensus in Egypt is not to let disputes over trade and war in Ukraine block global climate diplomacy. The UN process may not be perfect. But it has provided nations with a target to save the planet, which must be pursued at Cop27 to stave off an existential risk to humanity.

Holding the World Cup in Qatar has damaged football and I will not be going

Philipp Lahm



▲ *Drone lights depict the World Cup trophy over Doha before the tournament kicks off this Sunday. Photograph: Amr Abdallah Dalsh/Reuters*

As tournament director of Euro 2024, I am meeting many people from the huge German football base. They are children in jerseys with whom I take selfies, youth coaches who teach rules to their players, presidents of small clubs who have been volunteers for decades. They all love the lightness of football, know its educational power, appreciate its importance to our community.

When the conversation turns to Qatar, however, their tone becomes serious. Many consider missing a World Cup voluntarily for the first time in their lives. In the past, a World Cup was a folk festival, for children a football initiation for life. Today, some amateur clubs think about leaving the beer tables and the screen in the storeroom.

What this makes clear to me again is that giving the World Cup to Qatar was a mistake. It doesn't belong there.

Even the Fifa procedure was problematic. It was unusual that two tournaments were awarded simultaneously for the first time. Qatar and Russia won the bids, although there was stronger competition. The match schedule in Qatar had to be postponed from summer to winter. The heat in the desert had not been considered at first, although an internal Fifa report had warned against it and also pointed out other deficits of the Qatari bid.

Other reasons must have been decisive in December 2010. Many of Fifa's 24 elected officials were later banned, punished or legally prosecuted; two had been suspended before the election.

Another lesson from Qatar: in future, human rights must become an indispensable criterion at major sporting events. Qatar has made progress in response to criticism from fans and research by the media by ratifying some agreements under international law and introducing the minimum wage. But gay people are still criminalised, women do not have the same rights as men and freedom of the press and freedom of expression are restricted.

The conditions for the migrant workers, thanks to whom the World Cup is possible, have been devastating. Their deaths were accepted and not investigated, their families are not adequately compensated. This is what the human rights experts from the Friedrich Naumann Foundation say. Qatar has admitted abuses.

According to Forbes, the World Cup will cost at least $150bn (£128bn), which is about 10 times more than the World Cup in Russia, the previous most expensive. In a country the size of Kosovo and with fewer inhabitants than Berlin, there are eight ultramodern, air-conditioned stadiums.

There is no fan culture that could benefit from this. Often, not even a thousand spectators come to games in the Qatari professional league. Football is not a popular amateur sport in Qatar and there is practically no opportunity for girls to play. This is also understood as the lack of sustainability of a football tournament.

The approach of holding a World Cup in a new region is the right one. In 2010, it was held in Africa for the first time. Before that, I had travelled to South Africa, still a player at the time, to get to know the host country and the circumstances in which I would be playing. A World Cup could also have made a positive contribution to football culture in the Middle East, because there are countries with football traditions there.

Or if you extend the thought to the entire Arabic-speaking world: Morocco and Algeria. West Germany played Morocco at the 1970 World Cup and lost to Algeria at the 1982 World Cup. Before winning the title in 2014, we had to go to extra time against Algeria in the last 16; the game in Porto Alegre felt like an away game, so many Algerian fans had travelled there. Qatar have never qualified for a World Cup.

Nevertheless, this small country won the bid at the first attempt. Many fans from all over the world will have to stop over in neighbouring countries and travel to and from matches. In the stadiums there will be paid influencers to create the atmosphere and PR on social media. This atmosphere does not interest me as a football fan. I would only have flown to Qatar if my job as tournament director required it. Since this is not the case, I am staying at home.

In some countries, teams have been asked to boycott the tournament. That's something everyone has to decide for themselves. I think it's right that Germany are taking part and I would also be happy if we became world champions. Qatar is an economic partner and energy supplier to the west, Germany maintains diplomatic relations with Qatar and the decision lies 12 years back.

Everyone has to answer for themselves whether they watch the games on television. I will: the national team is important. The 2024 European Championship in Germany depends on their performance. If the tournament is to be a success, the team have to perform better in Qatar than at the previous two tournaments.

Even though the final is in Doha, I will switch on the TV. In principle, a World Cup is a great event. In sporting terms, a tournament of countries is more unpredictable, with more teams having a chance of winning the title than in the Champions League and many national leagues, where competition is almost frozen. The conditions in Qatar could favour surprises. The



▲ *A sparse attendance at the Ahmad bin Ali Stadium during the QNB Stars League match between Al Sadd and Al Ahli. Photograph: Simon Holmes/NurPhoto/Shutterstock*

rhythm is different, the World Cup takes place in the middle of the season, the teams have almost no preparation.

It is possible South America will make a comeback. Maybe an African country will beat a major football nation or a small European country will advance to the final, as Croatia did in 2018. Lionel Messi and Cristiano Ronaldo will retire from the global stage. A new star may be born.

It doesn't have to be a contradiction to find the political background of the World Cup questionable and still celebrate a festival. It is not a betrayal of our values to meet friends for a beer and talk boisterously about football and this and that. Another question is whether this World Cup will be the big one. It's winter in Europe and human rights are not non-negotiable in the host country.

But it is a human need to come together. A World Cup is also a community experience among like-minded people. In the special circumstances Europe finds itself, it can strengthen solidarity and resilience.

Philipp Lahm's column was produced in partnership with Oliver Fritsch at Zeit Online, the German online magazine, and is being published in several European countries.

People are cancelling their therapy with me because of stress about mortgages and rent – it's heartbreaking

Carly Dober

"Yes, I do," I answer earnestly when a new client asks me if I like my job. I really, really do. I am a psychologist and I have been working and volunteering in the Australian mental health space for more than 10 years. What I do not share with my new client is that I am growing increasingly worried about the proportion of people whom I am seeing less frequently than their treatment plan requires. It has left me feeling depleted, but that is something that I take to supervision.

A psychologist's role is to support people through situations, relationships and to connect or refer them to various health and welfare services if and when required. But we are just one component of a person's recovery. There are many integral elements to the therapeutic relationship and outcome that we cannot control.

Material wellbeing, for one, is a crucial element that determines many people's basic access to services, such as mental health. It also includes the cost of basic necessities such as food, bills and rent, household income, pay and fringe benefits from one's employment, financial security, standard of living and housing. In short, good – or good enough – living conditions are fundamental to mental health and wellbeing.

I have noticed this year in particular that a growing number of clients are struggling to meet their basic needs. They are drastically scaling back their living conditions, which is affecting the efficacy of the work that my colleagues and I are trying to support them with.

The Reserve Bank has lifted interest rates this month for the seventh consecutive month and has warned it is prepared to go higher to combat inflation, projected to reach 8% this year. This hike hits people with mortgages and is passed down to tenants. Feeling increasingly stressed about mortgage and rent payments, many clients

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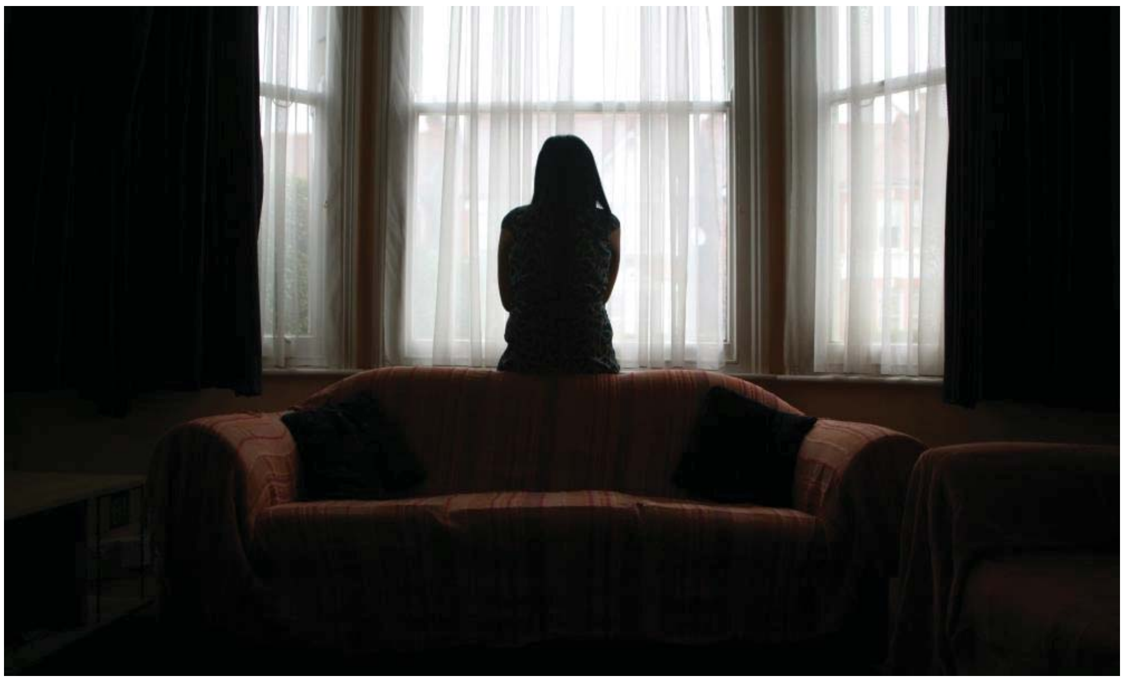
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are cancelling sessions, saying they are unable to afford continuing treatment.

These clients have sometimes left therapy for months at a time, returning in a worse mental state than before. They know they should be seeking treatment, and yet, there is no room in their tightening budgets. Housing affordability has broadly declined since the early 1980s and many clients are unable to pay for both housing and health.

Australia is experiencing a significant growth in the working poor population, where those in full-time employment have been priced out of rental properties or are forced to sleep in temporary accommodation. The Australian Institute of Health and Welfare reports the wait list for those seeking social housing grew by more than 8,000 households in 2021, up from 155,141 to 163,508, while the latest available census figures from 2016 counted more than 116,000 Australians experiencing homelessness.

With these financial pressures hitting people, how are psychologists meant to do their job effectively? Good therapy happens when people have



▲ *Clients have sometimes left therapy for months at a time, returning in a worse mental state than before. Photograph: Andrew Aitchison/Corbis/Getty Images*

enough money to meet their basic needs. It is incredibly difficult to help someone improve their mental health when their stress, anxiety and depression are coming from external factors.

What mental health professionals are experiencing is a kind of moral injury. Moral injury is the social, psychological and spiritual impact of events on people who hold strong values. We know financial stress is a risk factor, not just for anxiety and depression, but also suicide. We know that living conditions affect health and wellbeing. We know that people will choose to feed themselves and their family, to secure their shelter for one more week, instead of accessing vital health services. But none of these things are within our control.

Psychologists will often have to turn people away due to mental health services not receiving adequate funding. We often elect to see a proportion of bulk-billing clients and then see more clients than recommended. This leaves us at risk of burnout and other mental and physical health challenges ourselves. But it could be addressed with smart government policy.

I love my job. I really do. But it's heartbreaking to know that there are limits to what I can help people with.

● Carly Dober is a psychologist living and working in Naarm/Melbourne @enrichinglivespsychology

● *In Australia, support is available at Beyond Blue on 1300 22 4636, Lifeline on 13 11 14, and at MensLine on 1300 789 978. In the UK, the charity Mind is available on 0300 123 3393 and Childline on 0800 1111. In the US, Mental Health America is available on 800-273-8255*

I survived a wilderness camp: 'It's not necessary to break a person's will'

Ciara Fanlo

I was 17 when escorts drove me to a warehouse, strip-searched me and told me to put all my belongings in a shoebox. This was the culmination of years of alarming behavior that scared my parents: truancy, self-harm and several suicide attempts.

So there I was, being sent away to get well.

The escorts drove me deep into the wilderness of Colorado. I stared out the van window as the houses and telephone poles disappeared from the landscape, and the road changed from pavement to a dirt path. My crafty teenage mind plotted escape strategies, but I realized I was far from a town. I had nowhere to run.

It was the beginning of 12 weeks in a wilderness therapy program, without a tent, a shower, or a toilet. Before this, I had no idea of the kinds of places that existed for teens like me – one of the many kids whose parents turn to the troubled teen industry (TTI) to try and fix our emotional distress. The industry includes programs from lockdown facilities in the middle-of-nowhere Nevada, to therapeutic boarding schools in New England, with more than 120,000 youth placed into these behavioral modification programs every year.

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After hours of driving, I was dropped off at a campsite with a group of teenage girls and some adult guides. The girls' hair was matted, their skin caked with dirt, and a lingering smell of sweat and campfire wafted from their bodies. They were all dressed in the same red shirts and cargo pants. I looked down and realized I was wearing their uniform. I was one of them now.

Quickly, I learned the rules of my new environment: I had to stay within



▲ *'The routine was rigid. In the morning we ate breakfast, packed up camp and hiked … I found the rules oppressive and ridiculous.' Illustration: Lola Beltran/The Guardian*

an arm's reach of a guide at all times. I could not even go to the bathroom alone. I slept sandwiched between two guides, with a tarp over my sleeping bag to prevent me from running away.

My mentor was Rose, a warm 16-year-old girl with scabbed knees and bug-bitten arms. Rose told me she had been in the woods for 22 days. She was taken by escorts from her hospital bed, following a heroin overdose in a church bathroom. Her face lit up as she told me about her two younger siblings and I felt sad, feeling her radiance and love, thinking of her unconscious on a floor.

For the first four days, I was only allowed to speak to Rose and the staff. When I finally earned the privilege of talking to everyone in the group, I chatted with the 10 girls, and we watched a plane fly overhead. It was bizarre to see such a clear marker of the outside world, continuing as it always had, despite the fact I was there, in the woods.

"How far away do you think that plane is?" one of the girls asked me.

"35,000ft?"

She chuckled. Her smile dropped. "Ten to 12 weeks," she said.

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My road to the woods was long and painful.

I felt acutely sad from the time I was a little girl. I started therapy at eight, and it helped some. Then my parents got divorced. At nine years old, watching my family fall apart, I had never known such pain. I was also at my fourth new school in four years, as my family moved back and forth between cities. As the perennial new kid, I struggled to make friends.

At 10, I cut myself for the first time. It felt like I had opened a pressure valve in my chest. I could breathe. By the time I got to high school, the sadness became so overwhelming that I could no longer contain it. I stopped going to school. I hung out with people twice my age. I argued with my parents constantly. At 15, I made my first suicide attempt.

I needed intensive treatment, so I was checked into a psychiatric hospital and prescribed a cocktail of psychotropic medications. After six weeks, I was released on a "home contract". In that contract, were the following rules, among others:

1. Don't cut class.
2. Don't drive the car.
3. Don't hang out with unsafe people.

Two months after my hospital release, I broke every promise on the contract in one afternoon, when I drove my mom's car without a license to meet my older boyfriend and crashed it. After the police called my mom, I'd never seen her so angry – or so scared. That's when she called an educational consultant.

These consultants can refer teens to alternative educational services that can cost as much as a deposit on a house. The teen is hardly ever included in the decision. Ours convinced my mom that sending me to a wilderness program would help – with time in nature, I might regulate and heal. I was told it would be like a sleep-away summer camp: I'd live in a cabin, do day treks and see a therapist. At most, I thought I'd be gone for two weeks.

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As I connected with the group – on hikes, around the campfire, fetching water – I learned more about everyone's lives and stories. All had serious problems: disordered eating, substance abuse, self-harm, suicide attempts. One girl disappeared from home for weeks on a meth bender. Another purposefully broke her own arm. Almost every girl had a history of sexual trauma. Most of us had either been in a hospital or rehab beforehand. A few were on their second or third time in wilderness therapy.

We bonded by complaining about the rules and swapping our most shocking stories from home. If we had conversations out of earshot of a guide, we were given days of silence as a consequence. So we passed notes. The humor we managed to create about the whole situation, filtered through sarcastic quips, helped us get through.

The routine was rigid. In the morning we ate breakfast, packed up camp and hiked. Then, in the evening, we set up camp, cooked dinner and slept. We were taught survival skills, like making fire with a primitive bow drill set. We



▲ *Teens are rarely included in decisions about mental health camps. Illustration: Lola Beltran/The Guardian*

each harvested our own fire set, carving spindles from chopped wood and fashioning bows from branches. Every girl was always on the lookout for a cow's ankle bone since those made the best handhold, the piece that applied pressure to the spindle while drilling.

There were many layers of discomfort: we were made to sleep on the ground and bathed once a week, with just a bucket of cold water. There was the mental discomfort of not knowing how long I would be there, or where I would go when it was over, as well as the emotional pain of being so far from home, from everyone I loved.

We all held onto memories and future fantasies like lanterns lighting the way – how it would feel to wash our faces again, dip our feet in the ocean. We kept lists of the food we would eat when we got out – banana pancakes, burritos with green salsa.

In the beginning, I hated the program and was resistant to authority. I found the rules oppressive and ridiculous – I had to yell my name when I went to the bathroom, so a guide always knew where I was. My shoes were confiscated every night to prevent me from running away. We were not allowed to know the time of day or the plans ahead, so we were always kept in the dark.

But there were parts of the program

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I started to enjoy. I wasn't used to talking with friends about what I was really feeling. At home, I was so ashamed of how "wrong" I was and tried to hide it. There, I realized I was not as strange or alone as I had believed. After a week, I began to understand more about the philosophy of wilderness therapy: the challenges of living in nature were leading us to develop responsibility, adaptability and character.

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While I accepted the physical hardship as part of it, we were forced to endure indignities that seemed gratuitous and cruel. We usually got our water from cow ponds, treating it with chlorine dioxide that did little for the taste. Sometimes we'd see cows defecating in the water while we filled our bottles. Ten days in, I got sick. Instead of allowing me to vomit on the ground, the guides forced me to throw up in a trash bag. They told me it was because I couldn't leave a trace behind, but we buried our feces, so I knew it was because they were annoyed with me. They made me carry the bag of vomit for five days.

The next day,a guide forced me to drink laxatives since I hadn't had a bowel movement in days. When I refused because they were making me nauseous, the guide told me the group wouldn't be allowed to eat dinner unless I complied. Crying, I chugged the bottle. I felt completely helpless. I was developing what would become a key survival strategy throughout my entire time in treatment: to ignore my instincts and silence my voice to make progress in the program.

Later that night, I soiled my pants. When I begged a guide to borrow her headlamp to properly clean myself, she refused, saying I hadn't "earned" a headlamp yet. I was humiliated, but Rose reassured me that everyone had gone through it.

"Shitting your pants is one of the levels here," she joked, referring to the therapeutic levels students needed to complete for graduation. At that point, I had cried so much that I could only laugh. But I was still angry – what was therapeutic about denying us basic dignities?

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Three weeks into the program, our families sent us "impact letters", in which they described how our behavior had affected them. The process was supposed to help us understand the seriousness of the actions that got us there.

Instead of reading them privately, we had to read them for the first time to the group.

Everyone gathered in a circle, and I was handed one letter at a time: from my mom, my dad and my stepmom. My family wrote about their sadness and fear at my reflex towards self-harm; their anger and frustration with my dishonesty. And in every letter, they wrote that they loved me. And that nothing could ever change that.

"I sent you away on this program because you were on a path of self-destruction, and it seemed you had given up on working towards something better for yourself.

"I have watched your bright light turn dark, and it's been sad and scary. I found so many tissues wadded up with blood from your cutting in your room.

"You didn't seem to care about anything or anyone, including yourself. I worried the next step was all too real and might cause you permanent harm."

When I finished reading, I felt such shame that I cried until I could barely breathe.

My therapist told me to make eye contact with everyone in the circle. I saw that all my friends had tears in their eyes. "I love you," they each told me. If they could accept me with all my mistakes, perhaps I could forgive myself.

Nonetheless, these exercises were confusing. I was forced to share every mistake from my life, details that made me want to hide. And I had no choice but to stay in the discomfort of being seen.It was a violation of my boundaries, but the excruciating vulnerability was also healing.

The next week, we went through a therapeutic exercise called "solos". We were alone for three days, separated from each other, but still checked on occasionally by a guide. The idea was to be in solitude and stillness and see what arose.

I was left alone with years of unprocessed grief, sadness and shame – feelings that I had tried desperately to numb. But now there was no escape. So I finally sat with my pain on the forest floor. "I am right here," I whispered to my heart. "I am not going anywhere."

After that experience, I began to feel a sense of competence, of worthiness. Slowly, I was creating a body of counter-evidence to all my stories about being defective: I was carrying everything I needed on my back, hiking for miles and miles, holding myself through my emotions. I started to feel clearer about who I was.

Away from the constant noise and pressures that all young people face, we rose with the sun, walked on the Earth, and cooked over a fire we made from sticks and rocks. How good it felt to live that way, the way people had for millennia – rooted in simplicity and connection.

The survival techniques I scoffed at became treasured skills. I learned how to navigate with a map, read constellations, identify plants. Orienting myself in the world helped me feel like I was truly a part of it and that I belonged.

Nature held us in her embrace and imparted lessons through her teachings. One night, I woke up during a thunderstorm, my sleeping bag submerged in water. I was soaked through to my bones. Before going to sleep, I had neglected to dig trenches around my shelter, even though I could tell it might rain. And now, I had hours of wet darkness ahead of me. Lesson learned: every choice I made led to an outcome.

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At the very end of the program, my parents and brother came to visit me for a weekend of family therapy. For the first time in years, I could receive their tenderness – my mother secretly washing my hair with hotel shampoo she smuggled in, my father crying when he hugged me, my brother bringing me childhood photos of us from home. We started the process of mending our relationships. Sometimes I am still brought to tears thinking of how bitter and angry I had been before I got sent away, how I pushed them away for years.

The intentions of these programs can be well-meaning – to give young people a transformational experience through time in nature. And the practice is ancient, many cultures sent young people into the wilderness as a rite of passage towards adulthood.

What these programs fail to realize is that it is not necessary to break a person's will to redirect it. Combining a healing experience with treatment that crosses into abuse is psychologically confusing. There is potential for harm in leading kids to believe that love and mistreatment can coexist in the same relationship. And it is unreasonable to expect that behaviors learned in a synthetic culture will sustain themselves when someone returns home. Of the people I met in wilderness, I know of three who died from suicide and overdose.

Occasionally, I tell people about my time in the wilderness – the months in the woods with only two sets of clothes and the boarding school that prescribed sleep deprivation and peer humiliation as therapy.

Most blink back at me with wide-eyed surprise.

"They did *what*?"

"That's *legal*?"

"And your parents *paid* for it?"

I nod. Yes, yes and yes.

"I can't believe you survived that," they often say.

"Sometimes," I reply, "I can't believe I did either."

Names have been changed. Ciara Fanlo is the founder of Homing Instinct.

In the US the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-8255. In the UK and Irish Republic contact Samaritans on 116 123 or email jo@samaritans.org. In Australia the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international suicide helplines can be found at www.befrienders.org

In the beginning, I hated the program and was resistant to authority. I found the rules oppressive and ridiculous

US Latinos are soccer-mad. Why isn't that reflected in the World Cup squad?

Ramon Antonio Vargas



▲ *Cristian Roldan is one of the few Latino players in the US squad for Qatar 2022. Photograph: John Todd/ISI Photos/Getty Images*

Spanish-speaking soccer fans of a certain age have grown up listening to broadcasters refer to the US men's national team as "el equipo de todos" – everyone's team, representing the diverse cultural backgrounds that make up America. But the 26-player US squad for this year's World Cup, which kicks off on 20 November, has just three players representing the Latinos and Latinas who provide a considerable share of the game's supporters in the US.

Forward Jesus Ferreira moved from Colombia to Texas when he was 10, midfielder Cristian Roldan's parents are from El Salvador and Honduras, and Gio Reyna's grandfather is Argentinian. Luca de la Torre, whose father is Spanish, provides another Hispanic presence, but he isn't Latino. And one would have to stretch the definition of Latino to count Kellyn Acosta, whose paternal step-grandfather is Mexican. Ricardo Pepi, the Mexican American striker who settled a heated battle over his services by choosing the US over his family's native country, was left out.

Manager Gregg Berhalter's choices will face little scrutiny if his team get out of a group with England, Wales and Iran. But, for now, his selections have sparked a discussion about whether the roster reflects America's 62 million-plus Latinos, most of whom identify as soccer fans and who drove a 52% growth in interest for the sport in recent years, according to a report commissioned by Telemundo.

Some of North America's best-known experts on soccer are inclined to give Berhalter the benefit of the doubt at this stage though.

After all, Berhalter is hardly to blame for the way soccer operates in the US. The expense associated with participating in US youth soccer often sets up white, affluent children to thrive. The best of those players also frequently have European backgrounds – and EU passports – that let them seek opportunities in Europe's high-caliber leagues without requiring clubs to give them one of a limited number of spots for players coming from outside the continent.

In any case, it is not just coaches who decide who represents the US. Martin Vasquez, who played for the US and Mexico as well as acting as an assistant coach for the USMNT, says that dual nationals often choose to represent El Tri over the Stars and Stripes (he was able to play for both nations as his matches for Mexico were not Fifa sanctioned).

"It's individual decisions, and not that the players aren't given opportunities," Vasquez tells the Guardian.

At least three players who had a chance at making the US squad for this year's World Cup instead chose to represent Mexico: goalkeeper David Ochoa, midfielder Efrain Alvarez and defender Julian Araujo. As it happens, none of the three made the final Mexico squad announced on Monday

The recruiting battles over Pepi, Ochoa, Alvarez and Araujo are not only an extension of an intense on-field rivalry between the US and Mexico. They also symbolize the complex dynamics that go into which side not only to root for, but in some cases who to play for, when players have ties to both countries.

Now the coach of USL League One's Central Valley Fuego FC, the Mexican-born Vasquez got to know Araujo, Ochoa and Alvarez and tried to re-

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cruit them for the US. He understands their plight well, having lived it and – during his time as a USMNT assistant to Jürgen Klinsmann – having worked with others who had experienced it as well, including Omar Gonzalez, Herculez Gomez and Jose Torres, all of whom had Mexican roots.

"They all had dreams of representing the US or Mexico *and* going to a World Cup," Vasquez says. "What influenced me [to switch sides] was the better chance to be taken to a World Cup – on-field opportunity, in other words."

And it's what has happened on the pitch in the months leading up to the World Cup that has hurt the chances of some of the USMNT's Latino players. Pepi is a prime example. After the teenager scored 13 goals for FC Dallas in 2021 (as well as three more for the US), he moved to Bundesliga side Augsburg in January 2022 for a reported fee of $20m – and didn't net once in 16 appearances. He has enjoyed more success on loan to Dutch side Groningen – with seven goals in 10 appearances – but Berhalter has made clear that he is unimpressed with the Dutch league's quality. Instead he chose Norwich City's Josh Sargent, whose experience in the rough-and-tumble English Championship could be valuable with matches against England and Wales looming.

Some Latino "candidates just didn't perform well," says journalist Jon Arnold, who publishes the newsletter Getting Concacaf'ed. "I'm not sure there's that many players that are … really in the mix."

That's a position echoed by Luis Omar Tapia, the chief commentator of the Spanish-language broadcaster TUDN. Tapia believes the 19-year-old Pepi's switch from Major League Soccer to the Bundesliga was premature, and the accompanying reduction in playing time – as well as the loan spell – in effect ended his Qatari dreams.

"Pepi left when he shouldn't have," says Tapia. "And that's affected everything."

But perhaps Qatar isn't the goal anyway. Arnold and Tapia point out that Pepi will be 23 and approaching his prime when the US co-host the 2026 World Cup alongside Canada and, appropriately enough, Mexico. Other USMNT players will be in their peak years by then, including Christian Pulisic, Reyna, Sergiño Dest and Weston McKinnie, making a deep run at the tournament realistic, something that could draw talented dual nationals away from Mexico and towards the US.

Arnold believes a player like Alejandro Zendejas of Mexico's Club America, who's set off a Pepi-like recruitment battle after representing El Tri at youth level, could factor in upcoming USMNT matches. And Tapia says he has information that FC Cincinnati striker Brandon Vasquez prefers the USMNT over Mexico, despite having eligibility for both.

For now, Amelia Lopez of the Marketing Jersey sports consultancy and management agency says she doesn't believe attracting Latino and Latina fans to the USMNT is simply a matter of selecting more Hispanic players. The backgrounds – soccer or otherwise – of the few Latinos rostered for this World Cup could not be more diverse, underlining the fact that America's Hispanics aren't a monolith. Why, for example, would a Honduran-American fan cheer specifically for an Argentinian-American like Reyna when their roots are in countries thousands of miles apart?

"Attempting to properly connect with one part of the community often-times means you're disregarding another," says Lopez, who supports Mexico over the US because of her father's love for El Tri. "I think that is where US soccer will have to decide whether the lack of representation is a necessary consequence or a problem worth rectifying."

Yet Tapia and Vasquez have no problem with how things are. Vasquez hopes both of his nations make deep runs in Qatar. As for Tapia, Chile, where he was born, didn't qualify for Qatar, so he's all in with the USMNT, saying it wouldn't be a surprise for the team to make the quarter-finals.

Tapia says his "segundo equipo" – or second team – has long been the US. "My two daughters were born here, my four grandchildren were born here, I moved here when I was 14, and my whole career has been here," he says. "I always want the US to win, … and I think this team can."

'Let's try something really bold': inside Oscar-tipped Nasa doc Good Night Oppy

Radheyan Simonpillai

Opportunity is quite a character. I'm talking about the star of Ryan White's crowd-pleasing, Oscar-tipped documentary Good Night Oppy: a Nasa-engineered rover sent on a 90-day mission to Mars in 2003 that surprisingly stretched to 15 years.

Opportunity, or Oppy as some affectionately call her for short, is a melange of wheels, wires, antennas and solar panels that come together with traits familiar to humans. She has a neck that looks retrofitted from a kitchen sink drainpipe. And her head has cameras spread horizontally in binocular formation like eyes. And when the rover – in an early scene from Good Night Oppy – halts before what she assumes to be a Martian obstruction but turns out to be her own shadow, we can't help but attribute a comical personality to her.



▲ *'They created a robot that's lovable, adorable, has a face and has an arm. That wasn't by accident. That's by design' … a still from Good Night Oppy. Photograph: Courtesy of Prime Video*

Oppy looks and occasionally acts like Wall-E, the adorable trash compactor from the 2008 Pixar movie tasked with cleaning up the Earth after humans left our planet as a red dust-covered wasteland. Good Night Oppy's director White has heard that before. He smiles knowingly on a Zoom call from Los Angeles, admitting that his film has been referred to as the documentary answer to the Pixar movie, though the formulation should be the other way around. "Nasa's very careful to point out that Spirit and Opportunity came first," he says.

White welcomes the comparison. Nasa rovers like Spirit and Oppy clearly inspired Wall-E and the Pixar movie in turn was an inspiration on Good Night Oppy, a doc mixing archival footage of Nasa engineers working on the ground with CGI recreations of what both Oppy and Spirit got up to on Mars.

White's documentary often feels in conversation with movies from the past that stir childlike wonder and bring these stories about science and space exploration down to earth with humour and pathos. The relationship is right there on its poster. Good Night Oppy is produced by Steven Spielberg's company Amblin Entertainment. Their logo positions ET, the lovable alien from Spielberg's 80s classic, in the stars above Opportunity.

"ET was my favorite film growing up," says White, a self-proclaimed space nerd whose previous documentaries on tennis player Serena Williams and sexpert Dr Ruth were about extraordinary personalities who remained earthbound. He explains that Spielberg's ET provided him with direction for shaping a story around a machine whose sole purpose is to study space rocks. "It's a film about a non-human character that hopefully the audience will bond with or feel this emotional attachment with. And then at the end of the film, you have to say goodbye to that character. It's sad, but it's also very hopeful."

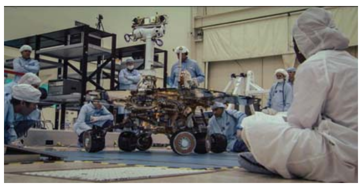
Amblin, alongside Peter Berg's company Film 45, approached White with this project in 2020, two years after Oppy's final transmission from Mars reporting a low battery and dark skies. Producers at Amblin and Film45 had secured Nasa's cooperation and access to the mission archives. White pitched the idea of not just relying on the archives and talking head interviews to tell Spirit and Opportunity's story, but to build a narrative using CGI that would put audiences on Mars alongside the two rovers. The film-maker argues that that was the only way to really do justice to a daring mission that – as his documentary narrates with riveting play-by-plays – had way too many opportunities to fail. "If we're going to make a film about this incredibly innovative and daring mission," says White, "we should be representing that in the film as well, and not totally playing it safe in a sort of educational DVD type of way. Let's try something really bold."

White says he made that pitch over dinner with Amblin and Film 45 on 12 March 2020. The day after, on 13 March, Trump declared Covid-19 a national emergency in the US. The world shut down but that didn't have a detrimental impact on Good Night Oppy since so much of the documentary was going to be made with archival footage and visual effects rendered by artists working remotely from all over the world. They were making a movie that takes us as far as science can reach at a time when our orbits were reduced to the space between home and the grocery store.

To recreate Mars, Amblin connected the film-maker to Industrial Light and Magic (ILM), the visual effects company formed by George Lucas in 1975 to make Star Wars. That's just another strand in Good Night Oppy's shared DNA with sci-fi movie history.

ILM had never attempted photoreal recreations of Mars before, but according to White they had the data from Nasa to be as authentic as they could in Good Night Oppy. The sun's direction, the tint in the sky and the level of dust would be accurate to the exact moment being rendered as Opportunity and Spirit roam the red planet collecting rocks, getting stuck in quicksand or shutting down to brave dust storms and deep freezes.

The film is also very self-aware that data collection, science and accurate images of a desert planet are not interesting to an audience without a narrative hook. "Try to explain gamma ray spectroscopy to an eight-year-old," astronomer Steve Squyres says in the documentary as a challenge, before explaining how Spirit and Opportunity made Nasa's work broadly appealing. The robots with their adorable Wall-E-like traits took on a life of their own in the public consciousness, long before lending Good Night Oppy an empathetic character to hang its narrative on.



▲ *Photograph: Courtesy of Prime Video*

That human connection comes across very easily in the film especially because the Nasa engineers would project so much emotionally on to the rovers, often describing Spirit and Oppy as though the robots are their kids. The engineers also tend to explain everything in human terms, like when a malfunction or system error is described as a cold or pneumonia.

"These robots are the stand-ins for these people," says White, explaining how the engineers at Nasa were essentially living vicariously through the rovers because they can't be digging through Martian rock themselves. "They inevitably project human qualities on to that robot.

"It's not just emotion and sensibility. It's also the design. They could have designed a robot in many different ways. They could have surely designed a robot that did not look like Short Circuit's Johnny 5. But they did. They created a robot that's lovable, adorable, has a face and has an arm. That wasn't by accident. That's by design."

Good Night Oppy is in cinemas now and will stream on Amazon Prime on 23 November

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In the land of the giants: does size really matter in the NBA?

Jacob Uitti

When word began to circulate, there was great hope. What could this 7ft 7in giant from Sudan named Manute Bol do in the NBA? Could his defense and shot blocking make memories of the greatest defenders like Bill Russell vanish? In his book, Manute: The Center of Two Worlds, author Leigh Montville describes the efforts to bring Bol from Africa to the United States to find out what he was capable of. In the end, though, Bol didn't have a legendary career. Yes, he was a fan favorite, known, strangely, as much for games in which he hit multiple three-pointers as he was for his blocked shots. But while Bol led the NBA in blocks twice, he averaged just 2.6 points and 4.2 rebounds per games across his career. Even his teammate, the much smaller Charles Barkley, would deride and prank Bol, not worried about retribution.

But Bol's career – like that of many super-tall, super-short and even rather heavy players – raises a question. In a sport that is regularly defined by height, does size*really*matter in the NBA? This subject comes into focus again today with the frenzy over the potential of the 7ft 4in French prospect Victor Wembanyama, who plays as fluidly as All-Stars like the 6ft 8in Jayson Tatum and who can defend as well as giants like the 7ft 1in three-time NBA defensive player of the year Rudy Gobert.

While the NBA is mostly known for its skyscraper athletes, there are also the diminutive water bugs who have made their mark on the league. Familiar names include the Charlotte Hornets' legendary point guard Muggsy Bogues (5ft 3in), the Atlanta Hawks' slam dunk contest-winning scoring guard Spud Webb (5ft 6in) and Boston Celtics All-Star Isaiah Thomas (5ft 9in), who was even an MVP candidate in 2016-17, finishing fifth in the voting. Calvin Murphy (5ft 9in) also averaged nearly 20 points per game throughout the 1970s and Earl Boykins (5ft 5in) averaged double-digits four straight seasons in the early 2000s.

Heavier players have had their days in the sun, too. Forwards Oliver Miller,



▲ *The 7ft 2in Bol Bol, son of the 7ft 7in former NBA star Manute Bol, has used his height to his advantage in basketball. Photograph: Rich Storry/USA Today Sports*

Mike Sweetney and Robert "Tractor" Traylor, all weighed close to (or above) 300lbs during their careers in a sport that's often reliant on speed and quickness. Conversely, the rail-thin Chet Holmgren – who is 7ft 1in and 190lbs – was selected No 2 overall in this year's draft. NBA legend and 6ft 7in sharpshooter Reggie Miller, who was listed at just 185lbs, recently became a top-75 honoree. And the slight Ja Morant is currently dominating in Memphis with the Grizzlies.

Size, though, can also negatively affect one's health. There is a history of taller players who have passed away – including Bol – or been seriously injured while still young. Indeed, there were doubts about Holmgren's durability leading up to the draft and he will reportedly miss the entire season with a foot injury. Both Sweetney and Traylor's weight ended up hindering the longevity of their careers. Traylor died of a heart-attack in 2011 at just 34.

Beyond the tragic, taller players have suffered from other health issues because their bodies demand so much and take in a great deal of impact. Highly touted 7ft 4in prospect Ralph Sampson enjoyed four All-Star appearances in the 1970s before his knees went out on him and his scoring dropped dramatically. And the 7ft 7in Washington center Gheorghe Mureşan, who earned the league's Most Improved Player award in 1996, boasted three-straight years of scoring in double-figures before his career was cut short due to injury. The 7ft center and former LA Laker Andrew Bynum left the league too early due to knee troubles as well.

But there have been All-Star-quality giants in the league, to be sure. The 7ft 3in Arvydas Sabonis is considered one of the best foreign players of all time. And the 7ft 2in Kareem-Abdul Jabbar may be the NBA's best player ever. He still holds the all-time scoring mark in league history, though it's soon to be broken by one LeBron James (who is 'only' 6ft 9in). The 7ft 4in Rik Smits, known as the "Dunking Dutchman," was an All-Star in 1997-98 and averaged more than 17 points per game from 1994-95 through 1997-98. The 7ft 3in Kristaps Porziņģis was an All-Star with the New York Knicks in 2017-18 and is nicknamed "The Unicorn" for his unique ability to play inside and outside. He boasts a career average of 19 points per game, but KP did incur a massive injury, sidelining him for more than a year in 2018-2019, likely due to his big frame.

Yao Ming, however, is the best of all the *biggest* big men. The 7ft 6in player was an eight-time All-Star and five-time All-NBA player with career averages of 19 points and nine rebounds in his time with the Houston Rockets, which was, yes, sadly cut short due to leg injuries.

Jack Ransone, an athletic trainer with the US Air Force Academy, says physical impact plays a major role in the injuries a basketball player – especially a larger one – suffers. Ransone, who authored a paper on the physiologic profile of basketball athletes, says that those who are bigger, from Bol to Shaq, can be more negatively affected, particularly as they already have a long amateur career behind them before they even reach the NBA.

"It is common for a player to compete in 200-plus AAU, All-Star and high school games in a year proceeding the NBA draft," Ransone tells the Guardian. "[And it has been] demonstrated that the knee was the joint most frequently affected by sports injuries … The excessive load placed on these young players opens the window to accelerate a normal level of joint degeneration and musculoskeletal abnormalities."

While Ransone notes that players of all sizes have suffered knee pain and degeneration, it is also obvious that if a player is heavier, his body will more likely have increased issues. Further, Ransone says, massively tall players like Bol sometimes suffer from rare health issues, like Marfan Syndrome. "Marfan Syndrome presents in individuals with disproportionately long arms, legs, fingers and abnormally curved spine," Ransone says. Along with Bol, one former Baylor University basketball standout, the 7ft 1in Isaiah Austin, suffered from Marfan Syndrome. Unfortunately, it kept him from even being drafted, despite strong collegiate numbers.

During the league's history, there have been dozens of solid seven-footers, but as heights creep above 7ft to 7ft 2in and beyond, the impact on the court doesn't often increase proportionally. Height, then, is likely not quite the cheat code to the game many may think it is. On the other side of that coin, the lack of height may also not be the death knell many might consider it to be. If you ask Bogues, who is the shortest player in NBA history (though not the shortest in NCAA history) and who continuously touts "heart over height," size is certainly not the be-all-and-end-all for a career. The floor general, who enjoyed a 14-year career, averaged nearly 10 points and 10 assists from 1989-90 through 1994-95. Bogues even garnered nearly 40 blocks in his career, once swatting a shot from 11-time All-Star seven-footer Patrick Ewing.

When asked if size matters to Bogues when it comes to the league, he's concise, "No," he tells the Guardian. "Not to me, it doesn't matter." To thwart any worry about the issue, Bogues says that he simply relied on his "skillset" to perform in the NBA, often turning what some might consider to be deficiencies into strengths. For instance, he notes, the basketball and the players are more often on the ground than they



▲ *Muggsy Bogues guards the 6ft 4in Doc Rivers during his NBA career in the 1980s. Photograph: Focus On Sport/Getty Images*

are in the air. And while Bogues could jump 4ft in the air when he wished (see: the Ewing block), he was more than capable when the game was on the floor too. He simply waited for opponents to dribble or turn before poking the ball loose and taking it for a layup or a dishing it out to a teammate.

Bogues, who was a teammate of Bol's on Washington during the 1987-88 season, says the two didn't have "conversations about the height issue." A student of the game, Bogues says he's seen the clips of Wembanyama and thinks he has a bright future. Height will be a factor, he says, but more than that, the Frenchman has talent in abundance. "His skillset is off the chart," says Bogues.

Throughout the history of the NBA, many of the best players (read: James, Kobe Bryant, Michael Jordan, Magic Johnson, Larry Bird and others) are tall compared to the average person. But they are not the tallest *in the NBA*. Bryant was listed at 6ft 6in as was Jordan. Johnson, Bird and James were all listed at 6in 9in. While some all-timers like John Stockton and Chris Paul were all around 6ft, the sweet spot seems to be between 6ft 4in and 6ft 10in, providing a combination of height, agility, durability and quickness. Any taller, and players are more likely to be less mobile and more susceptible to injury. Though, of course, there are exceptions to every rule, as anyone who faced Abdul-Jabbar or Yao Ming will tell you.

And maybe – just maybe – Wembanyama will mark a new evolution when it comes to how the league views the combination of size, talent and the likelihood of a long career."He's a skilled individual," says Bogues of the Frenchman, who is more than two-feet taller than him. "To be so big, it's impressive. I'll be interested to see what he does at the next level."

'Who remembers proper binmen?' The nostalgia memes that help explain Britain today

Dan Hancox

At 7.59pm on Christmas Day 2019, a meme was posted to a Facebook page called Memory Lane UK. It was a square, low-resolution image, the kind where a few words of text are layered on top, to be shared, copied, tweaked and reshared. In no fewer than three different fonts, and adorned with two union jack flags and a Facebook logo, it read as follows:

"Memory lane UKWHO REMEMBERSproperbinmen"

At 9.16pm that same day – barely a Christmas film later – a second meme was posted, this time a collage of grainy old photos of smiling binmen, insistently asking the same question: "WHO REMEMBERS Proper bin men?" At the time of writing, these two Facebook posts have attracted almost 7,000 likes, 3,000 shares and 900 comments. They were not the first "proper binmen" posts, but they were the first to find a wide audience, and inspired countless imitations.

The first thing you notice about these images – most of which are black and white – are the proper bin men's outfits. They wear flat caps, donkey jackets and dark trousers or dungarees, rather than hi-vis yellow vests, or overalls marked with reflective stripes and subcontractor logos. The postwar Britain they inhabit looks different, too: from the clunky old bin lorries to the

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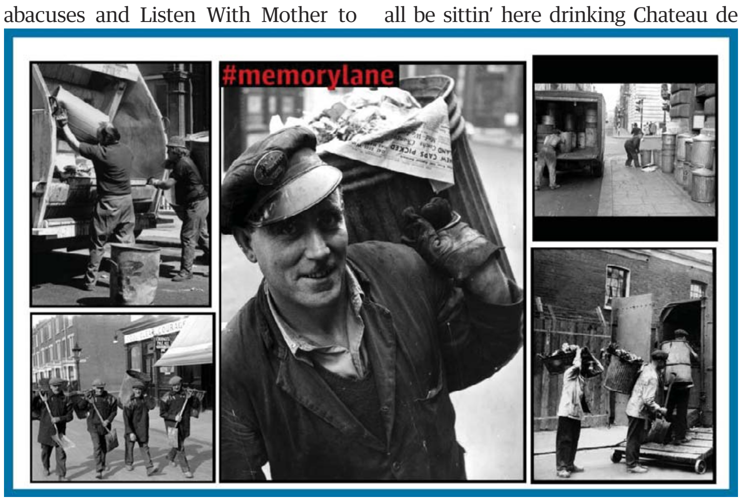
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smaller cars in the background. And then there are the bins themselves: cylindrical, metal, plain. Unlike their plastic, colourful modern counterparts, these bins are hoisted on to the bin men's shoulders.

To their admirers, proper binmen embody a lost postwar idyll – and the decline in national character can be seen in the appalling state of their modern-day counterparts, who are rotten in spirit, in character and in service. The "proper binmen" memes are popular to a degree that may feel initially baffling. They attract phenomenal interest and enthusiasm from older Britons on Facebook, where a whole constellation of meanings and memories are projected on to them: pride, anger, resentment, weariness, ennui and fond, at times very touching, personal recollection.

The proper binmen bestride a wider galaxy of social media nostalgia. The birthplace of the binmen meme, the Memory Lane UK Facebook page, is the sepia-tinted sun at the heart of that galaxy, a community 500,000 followers strong, created on 30 December 2017 by a reclusive Yorkshireman called David Rowding. At the time of writing, Memory Lane UK has a photo of two 1970s Mini 1275 GTs as its Facebook profile picture, and a header photo of claymation icon Morph and his friend Chas.

Though there is nothing generationally unique in the desire to bask in the banalities of your past, these nostalgia communities have flourished on Facebook as its user base has grown ever older in the past decade. There are many rival Facebook groups devoted to commemorating the same mundane aspects of life: The Yesteryears Revisited, Do You Remember This?, I Grew Up In The 1970s, The British Nostalgic Bible, One Hundred and Ten Percent British. Together, these Facebook groups have close to 2 million members: more than the official pages for Labour, the Conservatives and the Lib Dems combined. The baby boomer nostalgia industrial complex is thriving.



▲ *Photograph: Getty/Guardian Design*

This world, beyond its binmen, is populated with a fascinatingly humdrum array of nostalgic memes. Some are simple injunctions, a few words in all caps – "SHARE IF YOU REMEMBER" – over a picture of Steptoe and Son. Some are presented as questions: "When you were a child, did you have to ask permission to leave the table at the end of a meal?" inscribed over a black-and-white picture of a 1950s family dinner table, dad in his suit and mum wearing a smart hat. Others are bold declarations of fact: "In our day, you only had Lucozade when you were ill." Such posts acquire levels of engagement that official brand accounts such as Lucozade's could only dream about. Many posts are wordless, simply displaying an artefact from the reliquary of lost everyday objects, rituals and saints: three-bar electric fires, blackboard erasers, knock down ginger, spud guns, Rod Hull and Emu.

They form a bewildering tableau. Who remembers the cockle man?, ask the memes. Who remembers a dripping sandwich? Who remembers rag and bone men? One pound notes. Drinking water from a hose. Choppers. The saying "act your age, not your shoe size". Queueing to use a phone box. Playing in the street and yelling "car!". French cricket. Jam sandwiches. Scabby knees. Skipping. Routemasters. Salt and vinegar Chipsticks. Hot chocolate from the vending machine after swimming lessons. Coal fires. The slipper. The cane. The ruler. Getting a thick ear. Concentrated orange juice. Cumbersome lawnmowers. Traditional drapers. Stand pumps. Ink wells. Duffle coats. Tin baths. Marbles. Jack Charlton. Stevie Nicks. Forgetting your PE kit. Bus conductors. Bob-a-job week. Wooden ice-cream spoons. Snakes and Ladders. Ponchos.

Who still eats beans on toast? Who remembers turning an old sheet into a ghost costume? Who remembers sleepovers? Men opening doors for women? Slow dancing to Nat King Cole. Beechnut chewing gum. Worzel Gummidge. Sweets by the ounce. Icicles hanging from the window frame ("Before central heating!"). Miss World ("All natural. Not a bit of botox in sight"). The power cuts of 1972-4 ("we coped, we were strong"). Scrubbing and polishing your front steps ("That's when people had pride in where they lived"). Outdoor toilets. Cigarette machines. Flares. Playing in bombsites. Jumping in puddles. Roland Rat.

There are no births, marriages or deaths here, no wars, no world-historic events, no great men and women of history. There is no post asking "who remembers the Cuban missile crisis?" or "who remembers the sinking of the Belgrano?" Those questions are too remote from ordinary life. Over here, we have abacuses and Listen With Mother to talk about. The banality is the point. This is a world where a picture of three butter knives can attract 1,300 comments of fond recollections and reflections.

* * *

When we talk about the past, we always reveal something about the present. It is hard to imagine a more intriguing or overlooked body of evidence for assessing recent British social history than these Facebook groups: they have given us something like a more chaotic, 21st-century version of Mass Observation. They may not be "representative" in any quantifiable way, but the sample size is vast, and these memes are a canvas for a whole range of contemporary insecurities and collective memories. History is written by the winners, but anyone can share a post on Facebook.

Read through the thousands of comments beneath the numerous proper binmen posts and you will find a striking consensus.*Back then*, in an unspecified period between 1950 and 1980, the binmen were stronger, more hardworking and more polite. Not just that – back then, the binmen were *happy*. Everyone remembers them the same way: always cheerful, always smiling, frequently whistling. They always had a kind word for you, never complained, and always closed the gate. They took pride in their job, which was hard work, but honest work. These judgments are delivered with absolute certainty. Back then, "They were always a really friendly crowd who you could have a good laugh with," writes one commenter. "Not like the bin men of today, you are very lucky if they respond to a 'good morning'."

The historic shift in bin collection is taken to mark a wider crisis in masculinity. "That is when men were men, not the wimps we have today," writes one Facebook commenter. "All be off work with PTSD nowadays," chimes in another. Proper binmen "didn't care about Health & Safety Shite", writes another. The plastic wheelie bins we have today – with their emasculating pastels, often colour-coded for recycling, and their humiliating, labour-saving wheels – are just further markers of our moral, social and spiritual decline.

The proper binmen memes are a potent distillation of a sentiment common to contemporary British politics and culture, where politicians have all but given up offering a positive vision of the future, and where the idea of what constitutes progress is bitterly contested. Fond nostalgia for hard times is, of course, not new. In the Monty Python sketch known as the Four Yorkshiremen (*classic* British comedy), the eponymous characters, clad in bowties and white dinner jackets, reflect on how far they've come.

"Who'd a thought 30 years ago we'd all be sittin' here drinking Chateau de Chassilier wine?"

"Aye. In them days, we'd a' been glad to have the price of a cup o' tea."

"A cup o' *cold* tea."

"Without milk or sugar."

"*Or* tea!"

"In a filthy, cracked cup."

"We never used to have a cup. We used to have to drink out of a rolled-up newspaper."

As the sketch continues, the men summon up increasingly absurd scenarios to one-up each other: "We used to have to get out of the lake at three o'clock in the morning, clean the lake, eat a handful of hot gravel, go to work at t'mill every day for tuppence a month, come home, and Dad would beat us around the head and neck with a broken bottle,*if we were lucky*!"

The overriding sense from hours of scrolling Facebook nostalgia groups is of a generation who didn't see that sketch entirely as a joke, so much as a broadly accurate account of their own hard-won triumph over adversity. There are plenty of grim references to old-school bin-collection work being "back-breaking", and some apparently firsthand binman testimonies specifically refer to having "paid for [the job] with bad backs in later life". Yet there is a powerful anti-health and safety component to all of the Memory Lane UK reminiscing – against coddling, against rules and red tape, against the easy ride of modern youth. "Remember when your mum would let you lick the egg beaters without anyone freaking out about salmonella?" asks one post. "Remember when we used to play in the dirt?" "Who remembers getting beaten with a cane at school?" We had it tough. We kept calm and carried on. We didn't complain. We muddled through. We made do. We mended. It never did us any harm. It made us who we are.

Binmenism, as this worldview could be called, is distinct from the common type of nostalgia we are all prone to as we get older – that things were "better in my day". In fact, the memory lane memes and comment threads make clear that in terms of physical comfort, convenience, domestic labour, work, consumer goods and leisure choice, things used to be worse. But that is not the endpoint of the philosophy. If Binmenism had a motto to stitch on to its itchy old Boy Scout uniform, it would be: *things were worse, therefore they were better*.

And once you see this, you can't stop seeing it everywhere.

* * *

The deafening siren blaring from the memes themselves is the use of the word "proper". In an age of fakes, authenticity is everything, so no wonder being "proper" is so highly valued. Everything that has happened since the heyday of proper binmen, the memes imply, has degraded not just the authenticity of binmen, but the authenticity of each of our lives – and the authenticity of Britain itself. Progress is not all it's cracked up to be. "Wheelie bins came out and the bin men were a bunch o' jessies," reflects one Facebook commenter, whose dad was reportedly a proper binman.

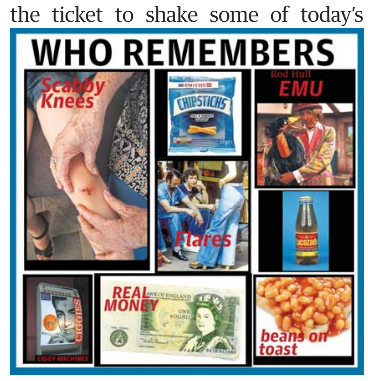
The online passion around these unlikely icons of The State of Things is sometimes mirrored in the real world. In recent years, there has been rising abuse, and even violent assaults, against binmen doing their jobs. In 2009, the columnist Richard Littlejohn blamed these violent outbursts on "Elf 'n' safety" and "the lunacy of the recycling rules and the Stalinist zeal with which they are enforced". The column was part of a Daily Mail campaign against wheelie bins, "the plastic monstrosities blighting our streets", imposed by "bin bureaucrats" hoping to improve recycling. The campaign was announced on the front page with the splash "Not In My Front Yard". The newspaper's leader that day described the campaign as "A roar for freedom". Littlejohn, the prophet who anticipated the online Binmenism that was to follow, wrote that the binmen of his youth had been "Strong men, doing men's work. The kind of English yeomen you'd always want alongside you in a fight."

The campaign failed, and the perception of decline has only deepened. In 2016, a video of a nine-year-old girl taking out a wheelie bin deemed too heavy by the binmen went viral. The Mirror reported that the girl's father "took the footage to embarrass the refuse collectors who, he suggested, had gone soft compared to the binmen of the past". The following year, a man in Walsall was jailed for assaulting his bin man with a second world war bayonet, after he refused to take a recycling bin contaminated with household waste.

The proper binmen are accompanied by a small supporting cast, such as the "proper football man" – one who is deeply suspicious of statistical analysis and foreign managers in designer coats. The late Lord Stoddart was commended after his death as a "proper Labour man" by Peter Hitchens on account of being a miner's son, getting into politics through "grammar school and hard work". Labour MP Wes Streeting has said his was a "proper Labour story": council estate and state school, to Cambridge University, via McDonald's, and then to parliament.

Suffering is key to being proper. And Britain's worsening energy crisis, inflation and inequality have ushered in a fresh wave of lectures on the moral benefits of suffering. Stern voices have clamoured to remind us that being dangerously cold, being desperately poor and enduring powercuts, broken supply chains, food shortages and cold baths has happened to Britons before, and it would probably do us good, if anything, if it happened again.

For the rich and powerful, this is a handy philosophy: they are rarely the ones enduring the pain. In February, Andrew Bailey, the governor of the Bank of England, whose annual salary is more than £570,000, told workers they should not demand higher wages, in order to contain inflation. In May, then-food and farming minister George Eustice told people they should buy value brands to "contain and manage their household budget". "Blackouts," wrote Telegraph columnist Robert Taylor in October, recalling the powercuts of 1973, "could be just the ticket to shake some of today's youngsters out of that sublime sense of entitlement and self-righteousness."



▲ *Composite: Rex/Getty /Alamy/Guardian Design*

From the Covid pandemic and lockdowns to the cost of living crisis, it seems that the harder the challenges of contemporary British life become, the more we are encouraged to suck it up, and channel the hardships of yore – usually by people who did not experience those hardships themselves. Since the start of 2020, "the blitz" has clocked up 37 references in Hansard, the official parliamentary record – only 11 shy of the 48 citations in parliament during the whole of 1940 and 1941, when the blitz was actually taking place. The first reference in Hansard to the famed "blitz spirit" was not until 1972. The phrase was not used again until 1999. But since 2000, it has appeared six times. The further away we get from the Nazi blitzkrieg, the more we are asked to revive the "spirit" of the time.

Underpinning this celebration of suffering is the masochistic idea that it is your individual responsibility – indeed an important test of your character – to withstand ruinous social and economic crises not of your making. It is there in Keir Starmer ventriloquising a dead monarch to a proper bin man's tune, with his advice on how the poorest Britons should deal with an economic situation that could very possibly kill them this winter: the Queen "would urge us to turn our collar up and face the storm".

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The Guardian

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Elizabeth II herself was, we can reasonably assume from the tributes which followed her death, a proper Queen. Under the headline "The Queen's 1950s frugality is key to our future", one Times columnist praised her for being "naturally parsimonious", personifying not obscene wealth and the plundered spoils of Empire, but the halcyon moment of High Binmenism, at some point in the 1950s, before the end of the Chatterley ban andthe Beatles' first LP. "In this age of Amazon Prime and Kim Kardashian-style super-rich spending, her frugality may seem quaint," Alice Thomson wrote, "but it feels timely. As the cost of living crisis hits, everyone is looking for ways to cut back, taking a Thermos of coffee to work, eating leftovers for lunch and sewing on lost buttons." That even a literal Queen has to be explained in this way suggests how deep Binmenism goes.

* * *

The battle to define what counts as "progress" is always fraught, not least because it is usually up to our political leaders to shape that narrative. For this reason alone, it is worth remembering that not all "progress" is necessarily good, and not everyone who queries the official narrative of progress is wrong. It doesn't mean they are right, either.

Alongside their mission to excavate the rubble of the past, the Facebook nostalgia communities often pour scorn on the objects and rituals of today's zeitgeist, in particular the damage done by technology. Computer games, smartphones, social media and TV are seen to create a disenchanted childhood, lacking in imagination, adventure and risk. The Binmenists' grandchildren are alternately pitied and condemned: "I'm so glad I grew up before technology took over" is a recurring slogan, placed over a black-and-white photo of old-fashioned youthful horseplay. "Fresh air in the lungs instead of playing Fortnite," recalls one commenter of their own childhood. "Not a computer in sight!" runs another near-catchphrase (posted, presumably, via computer).

Social media allows baby boomers to see the lives of their children and grandchildren in a way that was always partially concealed from them in the past. In response, they resurrect their own, very different cultural treasures and experiences. While some of the Memory Lane UK posts and comments seem to be motivated by a hostility to technological change or a bureaucratic nanny state, others speak to something deeper: to a vindication of the existence and survival of the person posting them. In one poignant meme, over an old photo of a rusty playground slide, inscribed in capital letters is the question: "WE SURVIVED DIDN'T WE?" On the surface, it's about not being killed by poor-quality playground equipment. But perhaps it's also about the solidarity of making it to late-middle or old age – perhaps a little disbelief too, along with the pride and relief. We made it this far.

Under the surface, there also lurks that Four Yorkshiremen-style macho-masochism: things were worse, therefore better. It is probably no great surprise that posts calling for the return of national service are overwhelmingly popular in the Memory Lane UK universe, but reading through the comments, their advocates seem uninterested in gung-ho militarism for its own sake, or restoring the British army or empire to their height. A zeal for the equalising, toughening effects of physical pain and hardship is the key recurring theme. In one Memory Lane UK meme, images of the binmen show up in a video slideshow alongside black-and-white photos of children playing in the mud, smoking, overloading see-saws and peering down open drains. The video is titled Little Trip Down Memory Lane – Before Health and Safety Took Over. Pain is a rite of passage, and anyone who sidesteps it will fail to become a proper adult.

The vitality of the nostalgia industrial complex is a reminder of just how appealing it is to have your private reminiscences, buried memories and hazy childhood images validated by others – whatever your age. It is a source of comfort to know you are not mistaken, that your version of your life's story is shared. Accompanying this is an anxious doubt about not having your experiences, especially your hardships, taken seriously. As Michael Palin says at the end of the Four Yorkshiremen sketch, after the men have reached an absurd climax in their arms race of childhood suffering: "You try and tell the young people today that … and they won't believe you!"

* * *

"We turn to the past when the future seems unattainable or utopian," Patrick Wright wrote in his 1985 book on British heritage, history and collective memory, On Living in an Old Country. Public malaise with the political establishment, the atomising effects of neoliberalism and austerity, and the dark threat of the climate crisis all make it harder to have faith in the future. Our gaze seems to inevitably turn backwards. The politics of the past few years abound with a desire for a return to an imagined, halcyon former version of Britain. This is true of both sides of the Brexit referendum; for remainers, there is often wistful talk of the 2012 Olympic opening ceremony or the New Labour period, while Brexiteers look back further into history.

Brexit, like the Memory Lane UK posts, partly speaks to an existential sadness about the passage of time and the desire for revenge on what we imagine it has done to us. You can only take *back*control if you have become convinced you once had it, and have had it torn from your grasp. "The nativist promise," Simon Kuper observed recently, "is that the betrayal can be reversed, that one day it will be bright, sunny 1955 again." The twist, of course, is that for Binmenists, 1955 wasn't even that bright and sunny: things were worse, and therefore better.

But even that strange twist – worse, therefore better – has an underlying logic to it. The political economist William Davies has described the way people who feel disenfranchised often find solace in nationalism. He writes: "The nationalist leader holds out the promise of restoring things to how they were, including all the forms of brutality – such as capital punishment, back-breaking physical work, patriarchal domination – that social progress had consigned to history. For reasons Freud would have understood, this isn't as simple as wanting life to be more pleasurable, but a deep desire to restore a political order that made sense, in spite of its harshness. It is a rejection of progress in all its forms."

Sometimes these Facebook groups comment explicitly on what is happening in Britain right now. When they do, they often channel the kind of grievance politics that animated the Brexit vote, all stitched into the "grey curtain of reaction" described by the late writer Mark Fisher: the grim cynicism and negative solidarity that characterises much of the past 40 years of British politics. For example, for most of 2021, Memory Lane UK's pinned post was a conspiratorial anti-mask post with 1.5k likes, 2.9k comments and 1.4k shares.

In another Facebook nostalgia group, Britain's history and its present concerns overlap directly. If you search for the word "history" in the One Hundred and Ten Percent British group, there are several coded – and several entirely uncoded – racist memes. One decries the toppling of the statue of Edward Colston (it's been there for 100 years, so how could it be offensive?); another the way the history of slavery is discussed (Britain cannot be racist because of how expensive its Slavery Abolition Act was); another condemns Black Lives Matter ("I refuse to kneel for a criminal thug," says one commenter of George Floyd). There is also a very popular meme that crops up repeatedly: the words "SHARE THIS IF YOU THINK BRITISH HISTORY SHOULD BE TAUGHT IN SCHOOLS AGAIN!" alongside an illustration of the signing of Magna Carta. After it was posted on 30 December 2019, 8,300 people duly shared it in approval of the idea of teaching British history in schools "again".

And yet, not everything in the Binmenists' world is so easily slotted into stereotypes of the socially conservative, curtain-twitching older voter. Also on display is a kind of humanist libertarianism, a strain of everyday British political life that persists beneath the sound and fury of the rightwing press. Under a Memory Lane UK post of a small child learning to a ride a motorcycle, which reads "Teach them to change gears NOT GENDERS", the majority of the most popular comments respond with sentiments along the lines of "live and let live". And when black England footballers who had missed penalties in 2021's European Championship final received torrents of racist abuse online, the Memory Lane UK community responded with stridentmessages of solidarity: "Racists do not speak for me. I am proud these men represent my country!" declared one meme.

* * *

If we are honest with ourselves, perhaps we are all prone to the odd Four Yorkshiremen-like moments. We all have memories we cling to, and all want to feel like the stories of how we got here have been heard: to remind ourselves and others that the smallest details of our pasts are worth recording. Our memories are fallible at the best of times, and the way we narrate our own lives can often be partial versions of the truth.

As a widely discussed LSE report into class identity made clear last year, people are capable of telling themselves some remarkable tall tales about their own upbringing and class position. The LSE researchers interviewed successful TV producers, actors and architects who all brushed aside their own private schooling, housing security and material privilege to foreground a single grandparent who was a coal miner. These are the myths many British people tell themselves – channelling Lonnie Donegan's smash hit No 1 single, My Old Man's a Dustman, that their fathers also wore cor blimey trousers and lived in a council flat.

Whether our images of worse-but-better times are accurate, or just scrappy patchworks of meme, myth and memory, they are deeply ingrained. It is not good enough to merely dismiss the Facebook nostalgics' sepia-tinted version of history out of hand, if you care about Britain today. The proper binmen are living inside many of us, pulling our strings and guiding us not just down memory lane, but into the future.

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Crypto exchange FTX expects to have more than 1m creditors

Alex Hern UK technology editor

The collapsed crypto exchange FTX expects to have more than 1 million individual creditors, the company has said in its first bankruptcy filing, scattered across more than 100 companies in the wider group.

According to the filing at the bankruptcy court in the US state of Delaware, where FTX US is based, Sam Bankman-Fried, the founder and chief executive, stepped down at 4.30am on Friday, "after consultation with his own legal counsel".

"FTX faced a severe liquidity crisis that necessitated the filing of these cases on an emergency basis last Friday," the documents say. "Questions arose about Mr Bankman-Fried's leadership and the handling of FTX's complex array of assets and businesses under his direction."



▲ *FTX faced a 'severe liquidity crisis' on Friday, the bankruptcy filing said. Photograph: Leon Neal/Getty Images*

The new leadership of the company has been in contact with a large number of law enforcement organisations, the filing confirms, including "the US Attorney's Office, the US Securities and Exchange Commission, the Commodity Futures Trading Commission, and dozens of federal, state and international regulatory agencies".

Typically, the Delaware bankruptcy court requires the company to file a list of the 20 largest unsecured debtors but FTX has requested permission to do things differently: because it has more than 100 companies filing for bankruptcy as one bloc, it wants to amalgamate all the claims into one list of 50 people and organisations.

"There are over 100,000 creditors in these Chapter 11 cases. In fact, there could be more than one million creditors in these Chapter 11 cases," the lawyers say. "The debtors anticipate overlap among the various debtors' creditor lists, and certain debtors may have fewer than 20 significant unsecured creditors." The company has also asked permission to file notice by email, rather than post.

While depositors in a cryptocurrency exchange may feel similar to bank account holders, they have far less legal protection. In the case of a collapsed exchange such as FTX, they are simply unsecured creditors, and legally stand to be some of the last creditors to recover funds, far behind bank loans and slightly ahead of equity owners.

In the past, FTX has benefited from that disjunct between expectation and reality, acquiring the remnants of the failed crypto pseudobank Voyager this year with an explicit promise to protect every depositor in the company by rolling their accounts over onto FTX's platform. Now, those depositors have again become unsecured creditors.

Global corporations 'cheating public out of billions in tax', say campaigners

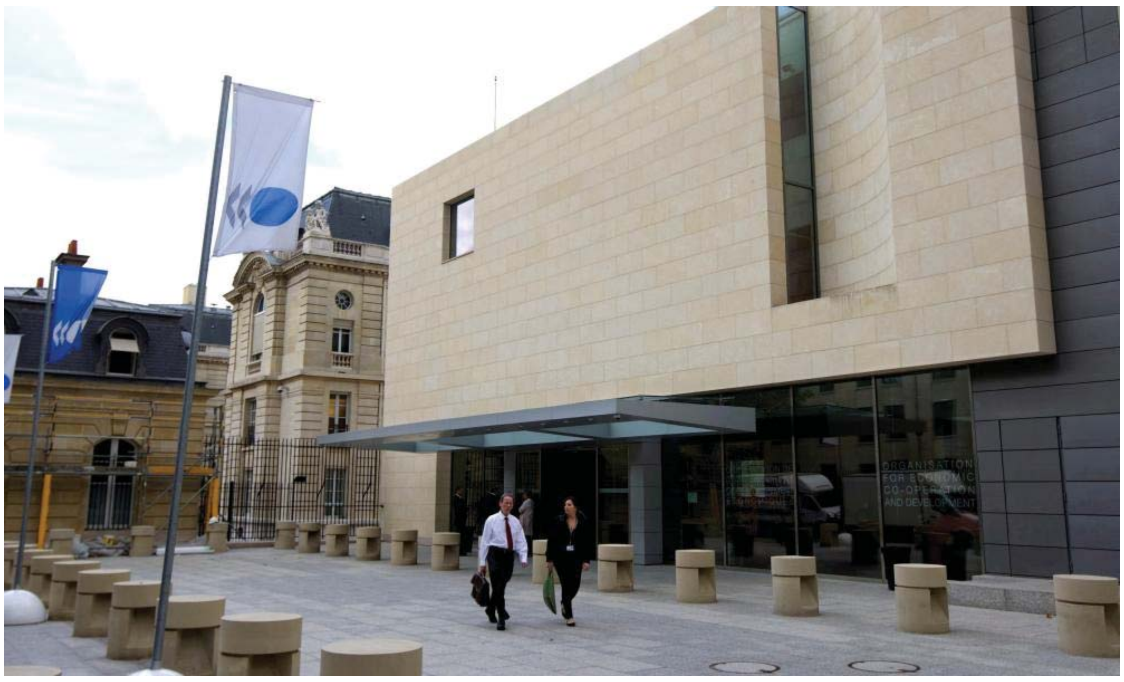
Larry Elliott Economics editor

Governments around the world could reap almost $90bn a year extra in tax if they made public their data on the extent to which multinational companies use tax havens, an advocacy group reports.

The Tax Justice Network said states were depriving themselves of $89bn (£75bn) a year by allowing some of the world's biggest companies anonymity over the way they conduct their tax affairs.

In its State of Tax Justice 2022 report, the TJN called for an end to the concession made to multinational companies that they would not be named and shamed if they provided information about shifting profits into tax havens under a global initiative – country-by-country reporting – pioneered by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development.

Some individual companies have voluntarily made their country-by-country reports public, and the TJN said that on its calculations, governments could recoup 28% of the $316bn lost in cross-border "tax abuse" in 2021 if a loss of anonymity shone a light on the activities of all multinationals.



▲ An OECD concession allows multinationals not to be named and shamed if they provide global information about shifting profits into tax havens. Photograph: Charles Platiau/Reuters

The UK legislated in 2016 to make country-by-country reporting publicly available but never used the power, and the idea was abandoned in 2020 by Rishi Sunak when he was chancellor. Last year, according to TJN estimates, the UK lost £27bn to multinational corporations underpaying tax.

Rachel Etter-Phoya, a senior researcher at the Tax Justice Network, said: "The OECD concession to corporate tax abuse is a political choice to turn a blind eye. Our governments patronise us with talk about making 'tough decisions' to deal with the global cost of living crisis, then choose to stay quiet about multinational corporations that have privately confessed to cheating the public out of billions in tax.

"They're choosing to protect the cherries on the cakes of the richest corporations while people worry about putting food on the table. Our message to governments is clear: stop the cover-up, to lift living standards up.

"As for multinational corporations, we call on you to come clean about your taxes. If you've got nothing to hide, if you're paying your fair share at a time when people are feeling the squeeze, publish your country-by-country reports."

A government spokesperson said: "The UK has been at the forefront of international tax reforms, which includes adopting the OECD's country-by-country minimum standard, and leading discussions to achieve the historic global tax deal last year.

"It is unlikely that the publication of country-by-country reports would raise additional tax revenue suggested by the Tax Justice Network because HMRC already receives these reports annually from multinationals and uses them in their compliance work."

The Guardian view on mass unemployment: inflation will drop without this pain

Editorial

Sharply raising central bank interest rates might prove catastrophic, rather than just inappropriate, as a solution to the current inflationary environment. That was the message lurking in the speech of one of the Bank of England's monetary policymakers, Silvana Tenreyro, last week. It's hard to disagree. While inflation is hurting the poor disproportionately because of their low incomes, rate hikes are a "cure" that is worse than the disease.

The Bank regards growing unemployment as a necessary trade-off to prevent the acceleration of inflation. Its central projection for rising interest rates suggests almost 2.5 million people would be jobless in 2025 – with the worst-case scenarios seeing 3 million out of work. This would lead to widespread misery. Nobody wants to be jobless. Karl Marx's reserve army of the unemployed is full of conscripts, not volunteers. Many are already deserting its ranks, preferring to leave the labour force entirely rather than be jobless.

Both higher unemployment and higher inflation lower wellbeing. The economist David Blanchflower showed in 2014 that unemployment makes people much more unhappy than inflation. Every one percentage point increase in the unemployment rate, he suggested, lowered wellbeing by more than five times as much as a one percentage point increase in the inflation rate. More recent work suggests people suffer "between nine and 13" times the daily anguish from unemployment than they do from inflation.



▲ 'The Bank of England regards growing unemployment as a necessary trade-off to prevent the acceleration of inflation.' Photograph: Andy Rain/EPA

Given the UK economy has only just emerged from Covid, orchestrating a deep recession is chilling. The Bank is operating under a flawed logic: that the more it increases rates, the more unemployment is pushed up and the quicker inflation is reduced. But this relationship between unemployment and inflation does not exist.

It is striking that the current low unemployment rates are now considered "unsustainable" even though similar unemployment rates were fine pre-pandemic. For a decade after the 2008 global financial crisis, inflation remained largely unresponsive to the fall from 9% to 4% in the UK's unemployment rate. Real pay was stagnant. Such a drop in joblessness should have produced rapid wage growth. This did not happen because of what the economist Michał Kalecki described as an economy's "degree of monopoly". This allows companies to limit the ability of workers, consumers and regulators to influence the markup of selling prices over costs and to defend the share of wages in output. Since 2008, UK average markups increased from 20% to 35%.

Prof Blanchflower correctlyforecast that in the US price rises would begin to slow. The Federal Reserve was caught unawares by last week's lower-than-expected inflation readings. The economist thinks Britain will probably follow the same path. The biggest driver of UK inflation in October will be the higher energy price cap. But to see this month's inflation keep rising at the same rate as September's would require prices to jump by about 10 times their historical average. That seems unlikely. Disinflation is the more probable outcome.

After the initial blast of higher energy costs and Covid disruptions fade, there are few ways for the inflationary shock to propagate. One mechanism would be firms marking up sustained cost changes. With no intervention to fix prices or a competition watchdog with teeth, Britain is a treasure island for firms to gouge profits using price rises. If that is happening, then the Bank's interest rate hikes threaten to push the economy into recession and harm millions of people – with little impact on the overall inflation rate.

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The Guardian view on the NHS: set up to fail by being underresourced to meet demand

Editorial

The NHS and social care systems need more money. If there is anything else that they need as much, it is honesty from the government. Post-Covid, the UK's health systems are in a perilously fragile state. As analysis by the Guardian showed this week, logjams created by delayed discharges appear to be getting worse. An average of 13,600 hospital beds in England are occupied by patients with nowhere else to go. As well as making new admissions impossible, unnecessarily long stays can make it harder for people to regain their independence after leaving. So far, a £500m emergency fund promised by ministers to ease the pressure has failed to materialise.



▲ 'The current problems were not caused by any one individual – but by 12 years of Conservative government.' Photograph: Amer Ghazzal/REX/Shutterstock

It is a symptom of the social care crisis that hospitals find it so hard to discharge people who are well enough to leave. Last year, Jeremy Hunt, then chair of parliament's health and care committee, said social care needed £7bn annually, not the £1.7bn over three years that ministers promised. Chronic workforce shortages in the sector, which are linked to funding shortfalls and inadequate pay, are one reason why social care capacity lags so far behind demand – leading to blockages throughout the health system. Currently there are an estimated 165,000 social care vacancies, after 50,000 staff quit last year.

In the NHS too, vacancies have rocketed, with almost one in 10 posts unfilled. At a time when demand has never been higher, this situation is untenable and creating new risks as patients struggle to access appointments and treatments while staff morale is undermined. The waiting list now stands at 7.1 million people in England, with almost 2 million more across Northern Ireland, Scotland and Wales. This is the longest ever, and 60% higher than before the pandemic. Delays have been linked to 30,000 excess deaths involving heart disease alone.

Mr Hunt was brought in as health secretary to clean up the mess left by his predecessor, Andrew Lansley – and went on to preside over decline of a different sort. Between 2010 and 2015, the NHS budget grew by 0.9% a year on average, an unprecedented squeeze when rises of around 4% were needed to keep pace with demographic changes as well as advances in treatment and technology.

Under Theresa May, funding increased. But the enormous burden placed on the NHS by the pandemic since 2020, combined with long-term failures in workforce planning, mean that the overall situation has dramatically worsened. Mr Hunt knows this better than most of his colleagues. As chancellor, he must speak plainly about the size of the challenge and how the government plans to meet it. This includes driving through proposals for a workforce strategy with the health secretary, Steve Barclay, as well as funding increases.

Mr Barclay and Rishi Sunak have both been challenged by members of the public over the state that health services are in. By accepting £400,000 to appear on ITV's I'm a Celebrity … Get Me Out of Here! barely a month after the Covid-19 public inquiry opened, the former health secretary Matt Hancock has displayed exceptional crassness. However, the current problems were not caused by any one individual – but by 12 years of Conservative government. Health and care services have been set up to fail by being underequipped to meet rising demand. This crisis is not going to be fixed overnight, and could get worse before it gets better. But a dose of realism from the chancellor would be helpful.

Grammy nominations 2023: Beyoncé leads race with nine

Benjamin Lee

Beyoncé leads the 2023 Grammy race with nine nominations.

The singer's haul of latest nods makes her the most nominated artist ever, tying with husband Jay-Z, both scoring 88 nominations throughout their careers.

Her genre-spanning album Renaissance is up for album of the year while hit song Break My Soul is up for both song and record of the year. Beyoncé picked up further nods in both dance/electronica and R&B categories.

Beyoncé has won 28 Grammys, and if she wins more next year, she could potentially beat conductor Georg Solti's record of 31 wins. She is currently tied with Quincy Jones in second place.

The singer was followed by Kendrick Lamar, who scored eight nominations. He will face off against Beyoncé in album, song and record of the year categories. His competition in the rap section includes DJ Khaled and Future.

Record of the year includes competition from Abba, Brandi Carlile, Steve Lacy, Harry Styles, Lizzo, Doja Cat, Mary J Blige and Adele, who picked up seven nominations. Carlile tied her with seven.

Adele previously beat out Beyoncé for the 2017 album of the year Grammy and paid tribute to her in her acceptance speech. "I can't possibly accept this award, and I'm very humbled and very grateful and gracious but my life is Beyoncé, and the album to me, the Lemonade album, Beyoncé, was so monumental, and so well thought out," Adele said on stage.



▲ Beyoncé has won 28 Grammys in her career. Photograph: Carlijn Jacobs Silver

Harry Styles, DJ Khaled, Future, The-Dream, Randy Merrill and Mary J Blige received six each. It marks 16 years since Blige received nominations for record and album.

The best new artist category, which has previously seen winners including Olivia Rodrigo, Chance the Rapper and Billie Eilish, features Anitta, Domi & JD Beck, Latto, Måneskin, Molly Tuttle, Muni Long, Omar Apollo, Samara Joy, Tobe Nwigwe and Wet Leg.

Controversial comedians Dave Chappelle and Louis CK picked up separate nominations for best comedy album.

Nominated stars who are not typically associated with music include Amanda Gorman, Patton Oswalt, Mel Brooks and Viola Davis for the audiobook version of her memoir. If Davis were to win then she would become part of the "Egot club", having already won an Emmy, an Oscar and a Tony.

This year's awards include new categories such as songwriter of the year (non-classical), best alternative music performance and best Americana performance.

Last month, Nicki Minaj protested against her hit song Super Freaky Girl being moved from rap to pop categories. The song was ultimately snubbed by the recording academy with zero nominations. Other snubs included Ed Sheeran's most recent album, Rosalía, Blackpink, Megan Thee Stallion, Elton John and Kanye West.

In October, Bruno Mars announced that Silk Sonic, the duo that consists of himself and Anderson .Paak, would be withdrawing their album from contention. At the 2022 ceremony, the pair won four awards for lead single Leave the Door Open. Mars said it would "be crazy to ask for anything more".

Drake and The Weeknd have also withdrawn their albums for consideration.

The 65th Grammy awards will take place on 5 February.

2023 Grammy nominations: the major categories

Record of the year

ABBA - Don't Shut Me DownAdele - Easy on MeBeyoncé - Break My SoulBrandi Carlile Featuring Lucius - You and Me on the RockDoja Cat - WomanHarry Styles - As It WasKendrick Lamar - The Heart Part 5Lizzo - About Damn TimeMary J Blige - Good Morning GorgeousSteve Lacy - Bad Habit

Album of the year

ABBA - VoyageAdele - 30Bad Bunny - Un Verano Sin TiBeyoncé - RenaissanceBrandi Carlile - In These Silent DaysColdplay - Music of the SpheresHarry Styles - Harry's HouseKendrick Lamar - Mr. Morale & the Big SteppersLizzo - SpecialMary J Blige - Good Morning



▲ Harry Styles, who received six nominations. Photograph: Jordan Strauss/Invi-

Gorgeous (Deluxe)

Song of the year

Adele - Easy on MeBeyoncé - Break My SoulBonnie Raitt - Just Like ThatDJ Khaled Featuring Rick Ross, Lil Wayne, Jay-Z, John Legend & Fridayy - God Did-Gayle - ABCDEFUHarry Styles - As It WasKendrick Lamar - The Heart Part 5Lizzo - About Damn TimeSteve Lacy - Bad HabitTaylor Swift - All Too Well (10 Minute Version) (The Short Film)

Best new artist

AnittaDomi & JD BeckLattoMåneskinMolly TuttleMuni LongOmar ApolloSamara JoyTobe NwigweWet Leg

Best pop solo performance

Adele - Easy on MeBad Bunny - Moscow MuleDoja Cat - WomanHarry Styles - As It WasLizzo - About Damn TimeSteve Lacy - Bad Habit

Best rock performance

Beck - Old ManThe Black Keys - Wild ChildBrandi Carlile - Broken HorsesBryan Adams - So Happy It Hurt-

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sIdles - Crawl!Ozzy Osbourne Featuring Jeff Beck - Patient Number 9Turnstile - Holiday

Best metal performance

Ghost - Call Me Little Sunshine-Megadeth - We'll Be BackMuse - Kill or Be KilledOzzy Osbourne Featuring Tony Iommi - Degradation Rules-Turnstile - Blackout

Best rap performance

DJ Khaled Featuring Rick Ross, Lil Wayne, Jay-Z, John Legend & Fridayy - God DidDoja Cat - VegasGunna & Future Featuring Young Thug - Pushin PHitkidd & Glorilla - FNF (Let's Go)Kendrick Lamar - The Heart Part 5

Best R&B performance

Beyoncé - Virgo's GrooveJazmine Sullivan - Hurt Me So GoodLucky Daye - OverMary J. Blige Featuring Anderson .Paak - Here With MeMuni Long - Hrs & Hrs

Best country solo performance

Kelsea Ballerini - HeartfirstMaren Morris - Circles Around This TownMiranda Lambert - In His ArmsWillie Nelson - Live ForeverZach Bryan - Something in the Orange

Best global music performance

Arooj Aftab & Anoushka Shankar - Udhero NaBurna Boy - Last LastMatt B & Eddy Kenzo - Gimme LoveRocky Dawuni Featuring Blvk H3ro - Neva Bow DownWouter Kellerman, Zakes Bantwini & Nomcebo Zikode - Bayethe

Best dance/electronic recording

Beyoncé - Break My SoulBonobo - RosewoodDavid Guetta & Bebe Rexha - I'm Good (Blue)Diplo & Miguel - Don't Forget My LoveKaytranada Featuring Her - IntimidatedRüfüs Du Sol - On My Knees

Inspirational passion or paid-for promotion: can BookTok be taken on face value?

Ismene Ormonde

BookTok, the nickname for TikTok videos in which books are discussed, analysed, cried about and turned into "aesthetic" moodboards, began as a small group of the app's users who wanted a place to talk about books. It has since grown into a hugely influential community that has the power to pluck authors out of relative obscurity and propel them into the bestsellers charts.

Earlier this month it was named FutureBook Person of the Year, an accolade which recognises digital innovation and excellence across the book trade. According to James Stafford, Head of Partnerships and Community at TikTok, BookTok is a community of "creative people around the world with a shared passion for literature". Publishers, creators and writers have generally agreed that this corner of the platform has had an overwhelmingly positive effect, having led to huge increases in book sales and the discovery of new writers. The Bookseller even recently called it "the last safe place on the internet".

But BookTok hasn't always been a force for good. Many of the app's users had been promoting the piracy of digital books via Z-Library, a popular "shadow library", before it was taken down by the FBI earlier this month. And not everyone in the books industry agrees that BookTok is "safe".

Stephanie Tubbritt, a bookseller based in London, noted in a Twitter thread last week that the way in which books are recommended on the platform leaves young readers vulnerable to graphic, inappropriate content. "More needs to be done to ensure that minors and their caregivers are aware of the content in popular books," she tweeted. Tubbritt believes that "no place on the Internet is a safe place," and thinks that calling BookTok a "safe place" fails to acknowledge "the inherent problems" it causes.



▲ *BookTok creators Madi Lim, Kevin T Norman and Shae'Loren Deering. Photograph: @limmadi8, @kevintnormanand @shaelorend/TikTok*

Meanwhile, as publishers make deals with both TikTok and its creators, many BookTok users feel as if their "safe" space is becoming too industry-led. For example, this summer, some of the app's reviewers received advance reading copies of Alex Aster's Lightlark, a novel picked up by publishers following the success of a homemade book trailer posted by the author on TikTok. As BuzzFeed reported at the time, reviews were mixed, with readers accusing Aster of, among other things, being an industry plant and misrepresenting the contents of the book via her videos.

Then, in September, TikTok announced a collaboration with Penguin Random House. The new feature on the app allows creators to link to books in their videos, automatically creating dedicated playlists highlighting other videos about the book. The response in the community varied. While British content creator and writer Dakota Warren thinks "the way they've gone about it is really clever", because it "provides an easy, accessible way to quickly learn more about the books people are interested in reading", another anonymous creator described the feature as "free marketing".

"Where's the commission for the creators?" they asked. Stafford contends that the feature "rewards creators who are having an impact on real-world book sales" and provides "great visibility". Penguin Random House was not available for comment.

BookTok began as "a properly authentic movement," says Anna Boatman, publisher at Little, Brown. Has the attention – and the money being funnelled into the platform – changed that? Among creators, opinion is divided. Madi Lim, a creator from the US with 59,700 followers, says that "the base of it is still the same," but she notes that creators are now aware that they can make money from their content. She says this can "put you in a weird position, where [some creators] promote books they've never read."

Shae'Loren Deering, a creator with a smaller following, disagrees. "I haven't noticed a shift in BookTok. I hope that if there is a shift, it results in more authors from marginalised backgrounds getting more attention," she says.

Paid partnerships are increasingly common among larger creators. "When I started BookTok, I never saw sponsored posts from book creators," recalls BookToker Kevin T Norman. Another creator, who wished to remain anonymous, says they received £300-400 per video less than two years ago, and are now charging up to £8,000 for two videos.

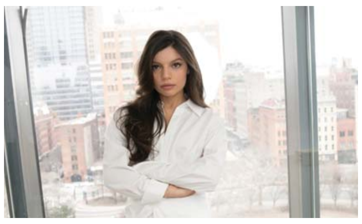
Norman is pleased that "book influencers are getting compensated and taken seriously". But Sana Goyal, reviews editor at Wasafiri magazine, is sceptical. "Publishers offering creators [money] is like publishers offering critics the same," she says. "Reviews backed by monetary power, pressure and influence surely can't be authentic."

At Little, Brown, Boatman says the aim is to be "thoughtful and curated" when engaging in paid partnerships or sending books out to creators. "Authenticity is the bedrock of what has made [BookTok] so special," she says. Norman agrees: he says he "mostly" has "a lot of creative freedom" when putting paid content together.

It's the way that books are talked about – or marketed – on the platform which is both the cause of the community's success and, according to some, its pitfall. Aster's viral video followed a typical trend where images meant to connote the "aesthetic" of the novel flash up on screen. When the initial reviews came in, it was this video which was criticised as misleading. "I was promised a POC hunger games [sic] dark fantasy. I got NONE of that" was one verdict.

Aster denies these accusations. "The early scenes I shared are all in the series in some capacity – either exactly as I posted or with edited wording," she says. Aster also said she felt it was important "to bring [her] followers along [on her] journey to publishing [the] book."

Her presence on the platform as a creator, though, has divided opinion. Deering says she enjoys seeing authors active on TikTok, but Lim thinks there is a "weird sense that the author has a direct link to any opinion you have of them".



▲ *Author Alex Aster, who was accused by some readers of misrepresenting her book, Lightlark, through TikTok videos. Photograph: Jennifer Trahan*

Boatman says that Little, Brown is often asked by authors whether it should be on TikTok. "I tend to say only if it's something you feel completely comfortable doing," she says, noting that there are authors whose books have been "incredibly successful" on the platform without having a presence themselves.

As for whether publishers are indeed "planting" certain authors on the app, Boatman thinks it's very unlikely. "We're quite busy," she laughs. An industry plant "would require some serious long-term planning".

Despite the controversies surrounding it, however, BookTok is still, at its core, a place for people who love reading and books. Stafford at TikTok praises the community's "unapologetic passion", and creators like Lim, Norman, and Deering note that BookTok has allowed them to read more widely while feeling represented.

Boatman sees BookTokers as "discerning" critics. "There are always books as an editor that you love, but that you don't have as much support as you wish they did," she says. "And it's been a joy to see books suddenly 'zoom' anyway."

"The more people share and talk, the more that individuals from groups that weren't – and aren't – represented can be represented," says Deering. "Younger me would be absolutely in love."

'It's relatable' ... The Crown's Emma Corrin on playing gender-swapping, time-travelling Orlando

Claire Armitstead

Emma Corrin wasn't yet born when Tilda Swinton took to the screen as Orlando in Sally Potter's adaptation of Virginia Woolf's novel, with a look that would create a whole new aesthetic for gender fluidity. So it's no little deal for the 26-year-old actor that, even before they step out on to the stage in the role, comparisons are already being made.

A swoony Instagram ad doubles down on the similarity for those who know the film, showing a stream of historic pictures washing past an androgynous beauty shimmering in bleached lace and satin. But, although the palette is similar, the temperature is very different: whereas Swinton was cool and remote, Corrin radiates an invitation to play.

It's an atmosphere that follows the actor into the room after a day of rehearsal in a chilly London chapel. Settling down into one end of an old leather sofa, they say they can't remember a time when they weren't aware of Or-

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lando. "But if I'm totally honest, it was mostly through the film – because of the sensation that it was, aesthetically and in terms of Tilda's performance, but also through the conversations it started about the fluidity of gender at a time when it wasn't really on people's radar."

Returning to the novel last year, Corrin was blown away. "I love how it throws up all these questions, and allows itself to hold them there before answering them, if answering them at all. That's a very real experience of life and identity, particularly with figuring out your gender. It's all about trying to answer these questions of how you feel, and pairing that with what society is trying to make you feel about yourself."

Since breaking the surface in season four of The Crown as Diana, Princess of Wales – a character they have described as "so queer in many ways" in terms of both the royal's otherness and embrace of fellow outsiders – Corrin has become a pin-up for non-binary identity with no qualms about sharing the twists and turns of their development on social media. Last spring they declared their pronouns to be "she/they"; a few months later they switched to "they/them". Why? "Because I was working on a film in the US, away from everyone who knows me, and when people called me she, it felt so weird and uncomfortable," says the actor.

This month especially the actor seems to be everywhere: doing the publicity rounds for a starring role in the forthcoming Netflix adaption of DH Lawrence's Lady Chatterley's Lover, while also appearing in cinemas as the young wife of Harry Styles's closeted gay copper in My Policeman.

At the other end of the sofa sits Michael Grandage, director of both My Policeman and Orlando: one a melancholy reflection on lost time in so many closeted lives of the mid-20th century; the other a joyfully anachronistic reflection on what is possible in life and art today. Woolf's novel has been archly crafted by the playwright and novelist Neil Bartlett into a magpie's nest of glittering wordplay, gleefully pilfered from many



'Empowering and cathartic' … Corrin, left, as Orlando with Akuc Bol. Photograph: Marc Brenner/PA

writers over the centuries from Shakespeare and Pope to Kander and Ebb, as well as Woolf herself and the lover to whom she dedicated the novel, Vita Sackville-West.

Orlando was published in 1928, a decade after women won the right to vote in the UK, and almost 40 years before homosexuality would be legalised in England and Wales. Grandage's introduction to the novel was at a Cornish grammar school for boys in the 1970s. "I cannot begin to pretend that I saw everything that was in it, but as a 16- or 17-year-old boy, the time-travelling was interesting to me: the idea that a writer could play with form to create a character that moved through time effortlessly – and that there was never any question about it. No one says, 'That's not possible.'"

Growing up at opposite ends of a tumultuous period for sexual and gender identity, the duo have an easy rapport but also the curiosity of two people looking at each other across an ocean of history. "When did you know [you were gay]?" inquires Corrin of Grandage, who has been in a creative and personal relationship with the theatre designer Christopher Oram for as long as Corrin has been alive. The question prompts an anecdote from Grandage about an upset at school, "when somebody spat the word 'queer' at me in the playground, and I had to go home and ask my dad what a queer was, because I had no idea."

He would have been about 14, he recalls, "and you have to understand that when you were 14 in the 1970s, it was like being 11, or even nine, now. And I remember my dad looking at me saying, 'Queer is a very bad word for homosexuals.' Well, that was no help at all, so I asked him what homosexual meant. There was a pause and then, in what I now appreciate to be a piece of supreme parenting, he said, 'A homosexual, son, is a free spirit.'"

"Do you think he knew?" asks Corrin. Grandage says he never had a chance to ask, because his father died when he was 18. "I think he must have done – that has to be why he said it – but even I didn't know at 14. I had no idea. In Penzance in the 1970s? Give me a break!"

Corrin ponders this before reflecting that, even in the five years between them and their younger brother, attitudes have changed. They dropped out of Bristol University after struggling with their identity, only finding their feet when they made a fresh start at Cambridge. "When I started dating a girl for the first time, my brother sent me a message on Instagram saying, 'Hey, welcome. I've been out for years.' And I was like, 'What?' He just quietly got on with it. So he has an amazing girlfriend, but he's into men and women and wears makeup and heels and is everything all at once. I guess it must be how it feels in his friendship group. But I think it's a testament to my family as well, creating a safe space for him."

Grandage points out that part of the mission of the production company he set up in 2011, at the end of a decade in charge of London's Donmar Warehouse, is to make West End theatre accessible for that younger generation by offering them cheap tickets. Many won't have any memories of Swinton's iconic performance in a film that is, anyway, of its time – and one big difference is the strides that have been made towards diverse casting. "There are 11 people in the cast and – I've got to get this right – only one of them is a man," says Grandage, carefully. What does that mean? "Well, you tell me."

It's a challenge intensified by the gender changes in the play itself. It's been funny, jokes Corrin, seeing him get his pronouns in a twist: "Like, 'He, she – oh no! I mean them.' Actually, though," they continue, "you're very good at it." Grandage accepts the compliment, adding, "I'll tell you one of the reasons I'm not worried about it – it's because, even before I started the process of casting, a trans actor said the most lovely thing to me: 'Look, all you've got to remember is that, providing it's never done with malice, getting it wrong is entirely forgivable, because everybody knows you're trying to get it right.' And weirdly, the moment you free yourself from that anxiety, you find you get it right."

"How queer to have so many selves," wrote Woolf in her diary in 1935. In a discussion of when exactly the word "queer" was rehabilitated, Corrin reveals that they haven't heard of Section 28, the notorious piece of legislation introduced by then PM Margaret Thatcher in the late 1980s, which outlawed the "promotion of homosexuality" by schools and local authorities. "It was a dark moment in LGBTQ history, no question about that," says Grandage. "We all marched against it, and Annie Symons, the costume designer on My Policeman, was arrested and went to prison for it. It's why I think the film is important: because we're at a fragile time when all those Section 28 issues seem to be bubbling up again."

It's not that everything is now going backwards, he clarifies, but that the forward momentum has stopped. "And going backwards is going to be terrifying. I think the moment that this young generation start to realise it might actually be happening will be the start of an uprising the likes of which we've never seen before. Because they are not going to give up the freedoms they rightly enjoy, after a lot of fights involving a lot of us over many years. Neither are we, by the way, but what a wonderful, powerful voice."



'When did you know?' … Grandage and Corrin. Photograph: Graeme Robertson/The Guardian

This, they agree, is why Orlando remains a groundbreaking work nearly a century on. Says Grandage: "It made people think, 'Wow, just look at the extraordinarily dramatic mind of a writer who can say, "He was a woman"' – the greatest line of all time. What does that trigger for a modern audience? We're using a piece of literature, and a play, to reflect a massive debate that's happening in society at the moment."

Corrin chips in: "It celebrates the opening of minds, and the ease with which we should be able to find fluidity within ourselves and our society. For me, that's very relatable, but also I think, for a lot of people, it will hopefully be cathartic and empowering. Isn't it really just an ode to freedom and love?"

● Orlando is at the Garrick theatre, London, from 26 November to 25 February.

Woolf wrote, 'He was a woman' – the greatest line of all time

Colbert on post-midterm Republicans: 'Coming together to pick a scapegoat'

Guardian staff

Stephen Colbert

Stephen Colbert breathed a sigh of relief on Monday evening at news that Democrats would keep control of the Senate following Catherine Cortez Masto's victory in Nevada. "Ah, turns out that 'red wave' was actually a blue splash, just as the maxi pad commercials foretold," the Late Show host joked.

Cortez Masto's win means the Georgia runoff election will not determine control of the Senate, "so Georgians will have to come up with a new reason to vote for Herschel Walker", Colbert said. "For many of them, it will be, 'he's my dad!'"

After a disappointing midterms performance, Republicans are "rolling up their sleeves and coming together to pick a scapegoat and hurl them down



Stephen Colbert on Republicans after the midterms: 'Rolling up their sleeves and coming together to pick a scapegoat and hurl them down an elevator shaft.' Photograph: YouTube

an elevator shaft", Colbert said. "Right now, knives are out for Senate minority leader and clinically depressed pudding Mitch McConnell" and the Florida senator Rick Scott.

"Republican candidates are mad at McConnell for not telling the voters what the GOP would do if they got control of the Senate," Colbert explained. "And they're madder at Rick Scott for telling voters what they would do if they got control of the Senate." Specifically, Scott discussed cutting social security and Medicare, which probably scared older voters.

"Most shocking of all, some of the GOP blame is going to the person who actually deserves it," Colbert added. That would be Donald Trump, whom one Republican strategist blamed for picking conspiracists to run for office, saying: "The MyPillow-ization of the GOP has been a disaster."

"To which Mike Lindell responded: use promo code 'GOP-Disaster for 20% your next pillow sham!" Colbert joked.

Trevor Noah

On the Daily Show, Trevor Noah also celebrated Democratic control of the Senate. "But remember, if Republicans take control of the House, then every dream the Democrats have of codifying Roe v Wade or taxing the rich or turning Pete Buttigieg into a real boy – they can't do it," he said. "I mean, they probably weren't going to do it anyway, but now they have someone to blame."

Still, though Democrats no longer need Raphael Warnock's victory over Herschel Walker in Georgia, "it would give them an extra cushion for when Joe Manchin tries to cockblock them, or Kyrsten Sinema goes rogue, or Bernie Sanders misses a vote because he's arguing with a grocery store manager.

"But can we just admit, now that the stakes are a little lower, you kinda want to see what Herschel Walker would be like as a senator," Noah riffed. "I'm not saying they should, and I'm not saying it would be good for Georgia or the country, but when he gets Mitch McConnell pregnant with another secret baby? It'll be all worth it!"

Seth Meyers

After a disappointing midterms performance, "Republicans are furiously pointing fingers at each other

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looking for someone to blame," said Seth Meyers on Late Night, "and honestly it's kinda fun to watch."

The Alabama senator Mo Brooks, a loyal Trump follower, said last week that the ex-president was "dishonest, disloyal, incompetent, crude" – "which is true, but Trump didn't prove that last week", Meyers said. "It's just last week, there were consequences.

"It's so great to watch these assholes turn on each other," he added. "They're like a bunch of roommates who got a pet cougar and now they're all like 'has anyone seen Dave?'

"Predictably with the GOP turning on him, Trump is lashing out with a series of absolutely insane and typo-riddled social media posts," Meyers noted. On Truth Social, Trump wrote that Arizona "stole the Electron" from the GOP Senate candidate Blake Masters, who lost to the Democratic incumbent, Mark Kelly.

"How is it possible that he typed electron instead of election?" Meyers wondered. "I would say that maybe Trump got screwed by auto-correct on that one, but then is it really possible that Trump's autocorrect hasn't learned the word election? It's literally all he tweets about."

Jimmy Kimmel

"It was an emotional weekend for Trump, because he gave away a daughter and the Senate on the same night," said Jimmy Kimmel on Monday evening, referring to the Mar-a-Lago wedding of Trump's daughter Tiffany over the weekend. "Many of the candidates Trump endorsed wound up losing," he continued. "Everything Trump touches dies, which explains why Melania will live forever."

Many expect Trump to announce his campaign for 2024 on Tuesday evening, but "not too many of his fellow Republicans seem that jazzed about it," Kimmel noted. "They tried to get him to delay the announcement; he said no. Many of them blame Trump for what happened in the midterms and see him as a liability going forward. But you know, we've heard this before. The question now is: are Republicans finally ready to break away from Donald Trump for good?"

It seems the answer is no for Mike Pence, whose memoir debuts on the same day as Trump's expected announcement. ABC aired an hour-long interview with Pence on Monday evening in which the former vice-president played down the threat to his life on January 6 – "take that, Monday Night Football," Kimmel joked. "It was two hours of Bachelor in Paradise and then an hour of Mike Pence. It's like herpes in the hot tub and then bleaching it out.

"Only Mike Pence could take a story where he almost got hung by a mob of insurrectionists and make it read like dishwasher instruction manual," he added.

'She worked in a terrified state': the extraordinary life of Charlotte Salomon, who died in Auschwitz

Anne Joseph

In October 1943, shortly before her deportation, the young German Jewish artist Charlotte Salomon gave Life? or Theatre? – her monumental series of semi-autobiographical artworks – to a friend for safekeeping. Upon arrival at Auschwitz, aged 26, newly married and pregnant, Salomon was murdered, and it would be many years before Life? or Theatre? would be exhibited.

Subtitled Ein Singspiel, a play with music, the work comprises over 700 multilayered gouaches, many with transparent textual overlays. Itis considered by some people to be the first graphic novel.Painted between 1940 and 1942, Life? or Theatre? combines historical events and personal memories, referencing film, music and theatre. It tells the story of a traumatic past and a troubled family marked by the suicides of more than one of Salomon's female relatives, including her mother. There are also hints of sexual abuse, a possible murder committed by her, and accounts of unrequited love. But throughout, there is a conscious blurring of reality and fantasy, with characters presented as fictionalised versions of significant and influential people in Salomon's life.

Her tragic life and legacy has inspired numerous books and films, an opera – and now an animated biopic, Charlotte, which premieres at the UK Jewish film festival in London today before going on general release. Directed by Tahir Rana and Éric Warin, Charlotte features the voices of a starry British cast led byKeira Knightley in the title role and including Jim Broadbent, Brenda Blethyn, Mark Strong, Eddie Marsan, Sophie Okonedo and the late Helen McCrory in her final film.



▲ *'Overlooked genius' … a scene from Charlotte, about the woman whose Life? or Theatre? is considered by many to be the first graphic novel. Photograph: Everett Collection Inc/Alamy*

So why does Salomon continue to fascinate, decades after her death? "It's the combination of her overlooked genius and the compelling universal nature of her struggles," Julia Rosenberg, the film's co-producer, tells me from her Toronto home. Rosenberg received a copy of Life? or Theatre? as a bat mitzvah present many years ago and was drawn to Salomon's story. "Perhaps I over-identified with Charlotte and her work as an alienated teenager and coming from a Holocaust family. But the similarities were not literal. It helped me think about feelings I had about myself that I couldn't quite define, feelings I had about intergenerational trauma."

Although Rosenberg had previously only made live-action films, animation seemed essential for this story. "Charlotte drew her life story, so I knew I needed to produce a drawn version of it," she says. The film evokes the artist's bold, expressive style, enhanced by a strong use of colour: dark interior scenes and rain-soaked Berlin streets contrast with verdant southern French gardens suffused with brilliant yellow light. The additional use of vivid recreations of Salomon's paintings connects to "how we felt Salomon was feeling at given moments" Rosenberg explains.

Charlotte broadly follows the Berlin-born artist's life, from her attendance at the city's prestigious arts academy – curtailed due to growing antisemitism – to her leaving Germany for exile in the south of France, where she joined her maternal grandparents. It was here that Salomon's grandmother took her own life, and also where she learned that the cause of her mother's death was not flu, as she had always been told, but also suicide.

Along with her grandfather, Salomon was interned in Gurs detention camp and, some time after their release, while in hiding, embarked on Life? or Theatre? She workedin a terrified and depressed state, both as a Jew living in Nazi Europe and from fear that she was genetically prone to mental illness. The artwork is an investigation, believes art historian Griselda Pollock, who wrote Charlotte Salomon and the Theatre of Memory. "The project is not autobiographical," says Pollock. "She undertook it to ask herself, 'Do I live, or do I die?'"

As Salomon's life and art were almost inextricably related, says the film's co-writer David Bezmozgis, factual accuracy was important. "The only scene that we completely invented – but based on credible supposition – is her visit to the Degenerate Art exhibition in Berlin in 1937," adds Rosenberg. "It's still the most attended art show in the 20th century and, as she was an art student in Berlin, we assumed she would have attended."

Charlotte does not shy away from controversy and shows Salomon poisoning her grandfather, despite official records stating that he died from a head injury after collapsing in the street. Even though it is open to debate, there is enough primary and secondary evidence, such as a confessional letter written by Salomon, which was discovered and made public in 2015, explains Bezmozgis.

"When we started the film, there wasn't this revelation about the poisoning," says Rosenberg. "And then we consulted with the Charlotte Salomon Foundation at the Jewish Historical Museum in Amsterdam [which holds the majority of the archive] who said that it seems to be true." The ambiguity does still leave room for others to investigate and come to a different conclusion, says Bezmozgis. "But we had to [take a view]."

There is also speculation within Salomon's work that her grandfather was a sexual abuser. But without sufficient evidence, the film-makers decided not to include this. "Wefelt we'd adequately demonstrated the relationship between the two of them," Bezmozgis says. "And that even if you take away the purported sexual abuse, there's reason enough for her resentment to support the fact that Charlotte might do something like [poison him]."

The film assumes a level of knowledge from its audience about the second world war and the Holocaust, says Rosenberg, which accounts for the film-makers' decision to portray little of the atrocity that Salomon would have experienced. "But I hope we managed to convey the loss and intense struggle she was going through."



▲ *Numerous books, films and an opera … Salomon painting in Villefranche-sur-Mer, France, circa 1939. Photograph: Alamy*

Due to its sensitive content, Charlotte is mainly aimed at an adult audience but Rosenberg says teenagers have also responded strongly to it. "Despite all the tragedy depicted, our wish is that audiences feel the sense of hope that Charlotte had through the power of her work. And the most we can ask for is that, when people leave the film, the first thing they do is Google Charlotte themselves."

● Charlottescreens at the UK Jewish film festival on 15 November, and is in UK cinemas from 9 December

● In the UK and Ireland, Samaritans can be contacted on 116 123, or email jo@samaritans.org or jo@samaritans.ie. In the US, the National Suicide Prevention Lifeline is 1-800-273-8255. In Australia, the crisis support service Lifeline is 13 11 14. Other international helplines can be found at befrienders.org.

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Monster munch: how Bones and All's cannibal chow was tastier than you might think

Stuart Heritage

There is a lot to unpack when it comes to Luca Guadagnino's new film, Bones and All. There is the obvious fact that this is the first film to reunite Guadagnino with Timothée Chalamet since Call Me By Your Name five years ago. And then there's the fact that Bones and All is about cannibalism, and it comes relatively soon after Chalamet's Call Me By Your Name co-star Armie Hammer was cancelled by Hollywood over accusations of, literally, being a cannibal. (Which he has denied.)

Which all sounds like quite a bit to process, so let's concentrate on something tastier. Chalamet's co-star Taylor Russell has said we shouldn't be scared in scenes where they both gnaw their way through mounds of human viscera as it was all delicious treats.

Russell told Slashfilm that although "Luca said that we were eating corn syrup", she didn't buy it. The film's effects team informed her that the guts and flesh were "maraschino cherries, dark chocolate, and Fruit Roll-Ups", adding that "If that sounds good to you, cool. If it doesn't, fair enough. But it was very sweet and [tastier] than anything else maybe you could imagine".



▲ 'Luca said that we were eating corn syrup' … Taylor Russell and Timothée Chalamet in Bones and All. Photograph: Yannis Drakoulidis/AP

Of course, that sounds delicious. Russell and Chalamet spent the entire shooting schedule chowing down on black forest gateau – albeit black forest gateau that had been explicitly created to mimic internal organs.

This revelation does, however, run the risk of taking audiences out of the moment. While reviewers have praised Bones and All for the delicate manner in which it tells its story of tragic, harrowing romance, that might no longer be the case now that everyone knows they're munching away on desserts.

Of course, Bones and All isn't the first film to use something delicious to create something disgusting. Famously, when Tim Robbins had to snake his way through a sewer in The Shawshank Redemption, human effluent was swapped out for chocolate syrup. But don't get too excited – it was mixed with sawdust for texture.

Similarly, when the android Ash was smashed apart by his crewmates in Alien, the unknown textures and fluids leaking out of his body were made up of pasta, caviar, onion rings and milk. Ridley Scott also threw some marbles in there for fun, despite them being fairly significant choking hazards.

My favourite secret food hack in movies, though, is one of the most commonplace. You know in films when a baby has just been born, and the baby is still covered in all the childbirth-related slime and gore? Turns out it's quite often a mixture of cream cheese and jam, spread all over the baby just prior to filming. This is a very strictly regulated process, with several flavours of jam banned thanks to allergy concerns, but delicious nonetheless.

Given the choice between that and ripping apart a load of cherries and chocolate disguised as human intestines, it would be a close competition. Maybe we'll see it put to the test in Chalamet's upcoming Charlie and the Chocolate Factory prequel – especially if they keep that scene where Willy Wonka forces a bunch of children to crawl through a tunnel of newborn babies.

You can't out-shoot a teenager: how to play first-person shooters if you're over 30

Keith Stuart

It is an unfortunate fact of life that human reflexes slow down as we get older. Medical studies suggest that reaction times peak at 24 and go downhill from there – and nowhere is this more ruthlessly illustrated than in the world of online first-person shooters. Head on to the average Call of Duty, Apex Legends or Overwatch server as a 35-year-old and it can feel as if you're surrounded by superhuman teenagers with hair-trigger instincts who rack up multiple kills while you're still deciding whether or not you should have inverted the controls.

Fortunately, there's much more to being good at these games than the ability to hit the fire button faster than anyone else. Approaching middle age doesn't mean you have to hang up your laser gun and start playing train simulators. You just have to be more strategic.

Here are some tips for mature gamers who want to remain competitive, even if their reflexes aren't so bothered any more.

Invest in the right equipment

OK, you're going to have to stop playing on that 70-inch LED display in your living room – with such a vast screen it's impossible to keep an eye on everything happening at once. Top esports players use smaller monitors – usually 27-inch, with super fast response times of between 1ms to 5ms. It's a really good idea to invest in a decent headset too, so you can get proper spatial audio. That way you know where footsteps – and bullets – are coming from.



▲ Don't hang up your laser gun … Overwatch 2. Photograph: Activision Blizzard

Stop sprinting

Whenever you respawn after getting shot in an FPS it's really tempting to hit the sprint button so you can leg it straight back into the action. Don't. Stop it. Sprinting does have a role in shooters, but in very specific scenarios. When you sprint, you're less aware of the environment around you, *and* it takes longer to get your gun into a firing position. For at least a few matches, walk everywhere until you get into the habit.

Lurk at the edge of the map for a while

The centre of the map is basically the slaughterhouse where most encounters occur and where lightning fast reactions are required. When you're learning a new map or game, try to stay on the outskirts, picking off enemies as they cross your vantage points. If you're playing a battle royale game, stick to the very edges of the active area, right on the cusp of the storm. You won't get as many kills, but you'll be limiting the number of angles you're vulnerable from and you also won't be running into a hail of gunfire every three seconds. Once you're comfortable, start moving inwards.

Always be prepared

When traversing the map, continually point your gun toward the area from which enemies are most likely to appear – ie doorways and windows. When you enter a room, check the corners. If there is a window, don't run straight past it – you're begging to be sniper fodder. Run along the opposite wall. Unlike pure reflexes, spatial awareness is a skill all players can learn and improve.

Use your mini-map … and your senses

Most first-person shooters give you a little mini-map display in the corner which shows what's going on in the area around you. It's likely your teammates will be shown as little dots or arrows, but your opponents will be invisible – unless someone on your team uses an ability to reveal enemy positions. It's vital, therefore, to use the map as a deductive tool. By the location of your teammates, you'll be able to work out where the enemies are. For example, if your squad is all bunched up and pointing in the same direction, you know they're engaging the enemy – and maybe you can sneak around and flank them. If your team is all spread out and looking in different directions, it means there's little direct engagement going on and you need to be very careful in the areas they're not occupying because that's likely where the other team members will be creeping about.



▲ *A smaller display is the norm in eSports, as illustrated by pro gamer Michael "Shroud" Grzesiek playing Call of Duty at TwitchCon 2018 Photograph: Robert Reiners/Getty Images*

It's important to combine this with other sensory info. For example, Call of Duty has a compass at the top if the screen which shows you what direction enemy fire is coming from. And all modern shooters make enemy footsteps louder than friendly ones, so you know who's nearby. Piecing all this info together allows you to build a dynamic mental map of the combat arena.

Mastering the field of vision

The chances are you won't beat a young player if you meet them out in the open. You need to find safe vantage points on the map that allow you to increase your field of vision and field of fire, while decreasing those of your opponent. Think of the arrowslits in a castle wall, which afforded archers

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protection without inhibiting their own range. Windows, wall edges, the areas between pieces of furniture or vehicles, areas in deep shadow … these all make you less visible, without infringing your own sight lines. If you can access a higher floor that overlooks lower courtyards or passages, that's perfect, as inexperienced players tend not to look up. If you're going to stop moving, crouch – you'll make a smaller target. And once you've fired your gun, move to another location.

You also need to use cover effectively while running around the map. Stay close to walls to reduce your visibility from higher positions and try to run in such a way that there are always objects directly behind you, so you can't be shot in the back from distance. If you're moving along a hill, don't run on the ridge, you're visible there: stay on the incline. Finally, always jump or slide when going round a corner or through a doorway where an enemy might be lurking – it makes you much harder to hit. If you can shoot straight while doing either of those things, even better.

Also: learn the maps! Learn safe cubby holes, learn the choke points where most fights take place, learn handy short cuts through buildings or down tunnels, learn the best places to plant claymores or proximity mines, and use this knowledge to predict where your enemy will be.

Tweak the settings

Don't just go with the default game settings – make sure they're right for you. Head into the menu and tweak things like motion sensitivity, aim assist and audio levels. Seek out tutorial videos for your game on YouTube, where pro players often give advice on settings – these can have a huge effect on your game. (Pro player BennyCentral has loads for Call of Duty: Modern Warfare 2, for example.)

Customise all load-outs

There are three things you need to think about with weapons: your own preferences, the map you're on, and which stage of a match you're in. In battle royale games, it's often better to concentrate on longer range guns, such as sniper and assault rifles, as you'll be engaging at longer distances. However, as the circle reduces in size, more encounters are likely to happen at close range, so you need submachine guns and shotguns. If the game you're playing has customisable weapons, your key aim should be to improve accuracy rather than fire-rate. Go for components that reduce recoil and increase range. If you're playing a game with set roles, such as Apex Legends or Overwatch, play into the abilities of your character. A support character in Overwatch shouldn't be taking the lead in assaults, and a tank shouldn't be hiding in a corner trying to hit enemies from a distance. Always be in character.

Do some homework

Most shooters have firing ranges that let you test weapons and see how recoil affects the spread of bullets. Some games allow you to jump on an empty server to explore – this will allow you to learn the maps, finding those little cubby holes with excellent cover, or those sneaky escape routes through tunnels, alleys or underwater. While playing live matches, learn the choke points in each map where players continually meet and fight; then find safer positions with sight lines into those spaces, rather than charging in guns blazing.

Also, gaming sites such as IGN, Gamespot and Eurogamer all have tactics guides filled with info, and watching decent players on YouTube or Twitch is invaluable for picking up lived experience and pro tactics. You can't out-shoot a teenager, but you can definitely out-prepare them.

'It's not against Islam': Pakistani trans actor tells of deep sadness over film ban

Zofeen T Ebrahim in Karachi

The transgender star of an award-winning Pakistan film that depicts a love affair between a man and a trans women has said she is very sad at the government's decision to ban the movie and hopes it will be reversed.

Alina Khan, who stars in Joyland, the first major Pakistani motion picture to feature a trans actor in a lead role, said: "I've been very sad. There's nothing against Islam and I don't understand how Islam can get endangered by mere films."

The 24-year-old added: "The Pakistani trans community was also very upset."

Joyland, which is Pakistan's contender at the Oscars, was to go on national release on Friday, but was banned over the weekend following pressure from hardline Islamic groups who called the film "repugnant".

Set in Lahore, the film tells the story of Haider, a married man who joins a dance troupe and falls in love with the lead transgender dancer, Biba, played by Khan.

Khan told the Guardian she adores Biba.

"She's a badass, strong-willed, fiercely independent, dominating, outspoken woman, everything that I am not; I loved the role I played," said Khan. When she was offered the role, she was relieved not to play an "oppressed" character "which is the life for most transgenders in Pakistan".

Khan said she was rejected by her family when she came out as trans. "My family did not accept me, but neither did society." She was told she embarrassed relatives, and her mother was constantly angry with her. "She would tell me not to make exaggerated hand gestures like a woman while talking, to sit like a boy and not be in the company of girls," said Khan. Her siblings called her *khusra* – a derogatory term, which was originally used to refer to eunuchs but is also a slur against trans people. But as Khan said: "I had never met a transgender [person] in my life so did not know what they were like."



▲ *Alina Khan, who plays a trans dancer in the Urdu film Joyland. Photograph: Courtesy of Alina Khan*

Joyland has been hailed on the festival circuit. It was the first Pakistani film to be selected as an official entry at Cannes in May, winning two festival awards and receiving a standing ovation in a packed Salle Debussy theatre.

"Tears were trickling down my face while I continued smiling. I don't know whether the tears were of joy, were for all the hard work that I put in, or for my struggles since I was a child and that continue," said Khan, who made her screen debut in the short film Darling in 2019. "For the first time in my life, I felt my talent preceded my gender, I was given so much respect."

After such international success, her family welcomed her with open arms. "They accepted me finally. They realised that I was not earning by begging or doing sex work," she said.

In August Joyland won best film from the subcontinent at the Indian Film Festival of Melbourne, last month it received the top award at Zagreb's film festival and it is Pakistan's entry for best international feature film at next year's Oscars, which has received the backing of the Nobel laureate Malala Yousafzai, who joined the film as executive producer.

However, the film had caused controversy at home. Mushtaq Ahmad Khan, a senator in the Jamaat-e-Islami (JI) party, called Joyland "cultural terrorism" and criticised the government for the "shameless" act of allowing its release. "I condemn it and will use every legal step to stop Joyland's release," he said. "Glamourising transgenders in Pakistan, as well as their love affairs, is a direct attack on our beliefs."

He is spearheading a campaign to repeal the 2018 law that enshrined transgender rights in Pakistan law.

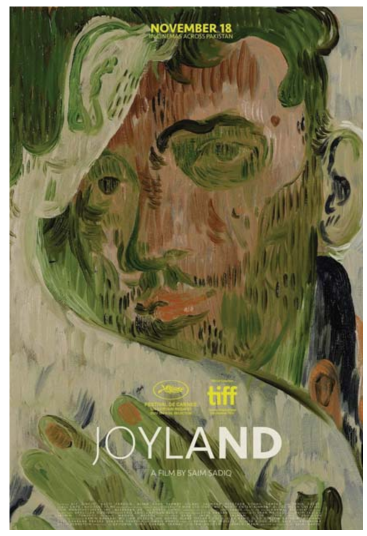
Cancelling the film's licence, which puts its Oscars' contention in doubt, the Ministry of Information and Broadcasting, said: "Written complaints were received that the film contains highly objectionable material which do not conform with the social values and moral standards of our society and is clearly repugnant to the norms of 'decency and morality' as laid down in Section 9 of the Motion Picture Ordinance, 1979".

Shahzadi Rai, a Karachi rights activist, was not surprised by the ban. "Of course this was expected. We're going towards religious extremism. I think soon Pakistan will become another Afghanistan. The trans community is extremely disappointed in the government for caving in to the pressure of the clerics."

She added that Alina Khan had "put us up in the mainstream in a good way".

Lucky Khan, a trans singer, said seeing such a film win awards was awesome. "I'd only seen our community begging on streets, performing dances or in commercial sex work."

Merub Moiz Awan, a trans woman, tweeted: "Had a cisgender woman or man instead of Alina Khan played the role of a *khwajasira* dancer, they'd have had no issues with it. But because it's an actual *khwajasira* doing so, they have issues. They want *khwajasira* people to be just begging in the streets."



▲ *A poster for Joyland, designed by the Pakistani artist Salman Toor. Photograph: Courtesy of Alina Khan*

The international success of Joyland has brought Alina Khan other film offers. "I would like us to be more visible in showbiz as we are very much part of society, like men, women and children are," she says, adding: "This film deserves an Oscar … it deserves all the awards out there.

"I hope I have opened doors for others in our community, to pursue their dreams."

Michelle Obama admits to hating her appearance in new book

Lucy Knight

Michelle Obama "hates" how she looks, "all the time and no matter what", she has revealed in her new book.

The Light We Carry, the former First Lady's second memoir, builds on her 2018 title Becoming, and aims to be a "toolkit to live boldly". In the new book, which was extracted in the Guardian's Saturday magazine, Obama discusses ways to overcome one's "fearful mind", which she likens to "a life partner you didn't choose".

"I've lived with my fearful mind for 58 years now," she writes. "She makes me uneasy. She likes to see me weak."

This part of her mind is constantly having negative thoughts about her appearance, Obama writes. There are "plenty of mornings" when she turns on the bathroom light, takes one look at herself in the mirror, and "desperately want[s] to flip it off again".

Her appearance, and her height in particular (she is 5'11") is something Obama has always been insecure about, she explains in the book. Always "bringing up the rear" at school "created a small wound in me, the tiniest kernel of self-loathing that would keep me from embracing my strengths".

Obama also admits to experiencing a "low-grade form" of depression during the coronavirus pandemic. "I kept with the work I'd been doing – speaking at virtual voter registration drives, sup-

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porting good causes, acknowledging people's pain – but privately I was finding it harder to access my own hope or to feel like I could make an actual difference," she writes. When she was approached by the Democrats to speak at the party's national convention in 2020, she put off responding – although she eventually agreed, calling Donald Trump the "wrong president" in her speech.

Any time she thought about the offer to speak at the convention, she felt "stalled out", she has now disclosed in The Light We Carry. She describes being "caught up in frustration and grief for what, as a country, we'd already lost".

"I felt a blanket of despondency settling over me, my mind sliding toward a dull place," she writes. "I was less able to muster optimism or think reasonably about the future. Worse, I felt myself skirting the edges of cynicism – tempted to conclude that I was helpless, to give in to some notion that when it came to the epic problems and massive worries of the day, nothing could be done."

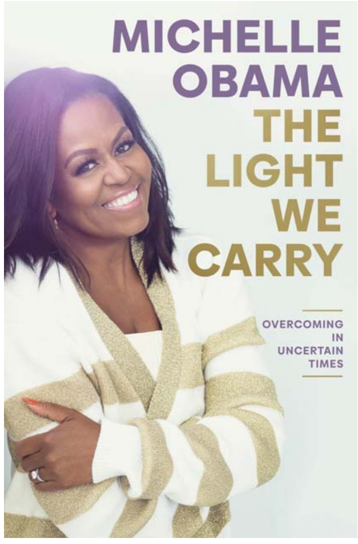


'I've lived with my fearful mind for 58 years now' … Michelle Obama. Photograph: Mandel Ngan/AFP/Getty Images

In The Light We Carry, Obama also reflects on the 2016 presidential election. "Whether or not the 2016 election was a direct rebuke" of her husband, who became the US's first Black president, "it did hurt. It *still* hurts", she writes. "It shook me profoundly to hear the man who'd replaced my husband as president openly and unapologetically using ethnic slurs, making selfishness and hate somehow acceptable, refusing to condemn white supremacists or to support people demonstrating for racial justice", she adds. "It felt like something more, something much uglier, than a simple political defeat."

Later in the book, she describes watching the "devastating" 2021 attack on the Capitol, which was "perhaps the most frightening thing [she had] ever witnessed".

Since its publication, her first book Becoming has been translated into 50 languages and more than 17m copies have been sold worldwide. The Light We Carry is expected to similarly top bestseller charts. In 2020, she was named the most admired woman in America, according to Gallup's poll, for the third year running.



Photograph: Penguin Random House/AP

Ron Peck obituary

Ryan Gilbey

"Director Needs Gays For First 'Real' Gay Film." So ran a headline in Gay News in the mid-1970s. The director in question was Ron Peck, who has died of cancer aged 74, and the film was Nighthawks (1978), which explored with candour and compassion the frustrating life of Jim, a teacher who spends his days among his colleagues and pupils, and his nights scouring London's clubs and bars in search of sex, love and companionship.

That initial appeal prompted about 250 letters from gay men and lesbians, many of whom Peck met or corresponded with. "My sense of what the gay world was expanded exponentially," he said.

A core group of about 20 emerged, and collaborated on research, finding locations, fundraising and general support; among them was Paul Hallam, who became the film's co-writer and co-producer. The BFI turned down Peck's funding application but that only left him more determined. "We would make the film anyway," he said. "Fuck the BFI."

Industry figures donated money, some anonymously. Members of the public sent cash through the post. The Sunday Times critic Dilys Powell mentioned the project in her column. Derek Jarman, who appears briefly in a walk-on part, lent his Butlers Wharf studio for a party scene.

Lindsay Anderson offered encouragement, while Chantal Akerman (whose 1975 masterpiece Jeanne Dielman, 23 Commerce Quay, 1080 Bruxelles influenced the film's use of repetition to express emotional paralysis) tried to help raise financing. The director Michael Powell considered the script ready to shoot but advised Peck to introduce more suspense. "Don't be above (or below) plot," he wrote to him. "We are storytellers not scientists."

In fact, Nighthawks does build impressively to a five-minute climax in which Jim, played by Ken Robertson, comes out to his students in response to their needling homophobic questions.



Ken Robertson, centre, as Jim in Nighthawks, 1978. Photograph: Osprey/Kobal/Shut-

The scene, cut together from five takes shot over two days, and populated (like the rest of the film) by non-professional performers, explodes with an improvisatory wildness held in check throughout the preceding 90 minutes or so. A subjective camera places the viewer in Jim's shoes, so that the pupils seem to be taunting and haranguing the viewer directly.

It was with a depressing inevitability that the presence of young cast members led to hysterical tabloid headlines, such as: "Child Porn Row Looms On Gay Film." Nighthawks was also banned in Greece. But for the most part it was applauded, even if sections of the gay community were less than thrilled by its downbeat tone.

The film's long gestation also left the dowdy cruising scenes looking dated in the age of glitzy clubs such as Heaven (which opened in London in 1979, the same year the picture was released in the UK), though its themes and concerns have never lost their immediacy.

Peck was born and raised in Merton Park, south-west London. His father, Richard Peck, was an estate agent and later property developer, while his mother, Joan (nee Lindsay), was in the Women's Auxiliary Air Force during the second world war.

Ron was a film buff from a young age. As a teenager, he corresponded with and even met some of his favourite directors, including Nicholas Ray, who brought Peck's letter with him to an on-stage interview at the National Film theatre in London, and singled him out in the audience. In 1963, he received a detention after skipping a PE lesson to see Michelangelo Antonioni's L'Eclisse at the Tooting Classic.

He excelled academically at Rutlish grammar school, where he gained nine O-levels and three A-levels, before moving on to study English literature at Swansea University and then to complete his master's in American Studies at Sussex University.

At the London Film School, he made the short film Its Ugly Head (1974) about a closeted gay man in an unhappy marriage. Peck and three LFS classmates –Joanna Davis, Mary Pat Leece and Wilf Thust – formed Four Corners Films, a workshop collective that aimed to fuse politics with art. The group operated out of an empty shop in Bethnal Green, east London, an area that the director made his home in 1975.

Early Four Corners projects included the quizzical documentary On Allotments (1976). Soon, Nighthawks began to consume the group's energies. "I remember the pre-production period as a stormy, exciting time," recalled Davis, who was camera operator on the film. "Investors' meetings in our grotty kitchen, 'actors' with hurt pride storming in and out, and late-night pilot shoots in the tumbledown shops."

For Peck, life and cinema began to blur as friends were drafted into the cast. "There was a real confusion in my mind about whether people were playing themselves or acting out characters." But the point of the film was never in doubt: "It was to put up on the screen something of that life which I and others were living."

His next project was a 1981 documentary about the artist Edward Hopper, whose most famous painting had lent its name to Nighthawks. He was an assistant director to James Ivory, an admirer of Nighthawks, on the Henry James adaptation The Bostonians (1984). Peck's short film What Can I Do With a Male Nude? (1985) brought wit and simmering anger to the subject of censorship. "Make no mistake, there are new dark ages just around the corner," says the film's prescient narrator. Three years later, the Conservative government's clause 28 outlawed the "promotion" of homosexuality in schools.

Peck's second feature, Empire State (1987), revolves around a Docklands nightclub that provides a focus for the tensions between working-class neighbourhoods and Thatcherite Yuppies and entrepreneurs. "One of the things that struck me was that the new East End was full of revamped pubs and theme bars which looked just like Hollywood fantasies," he said. "But if you ever see anything dealing with the area, it's always presented as grey. We aimed for something far more bright and hard-hitting."

He revisited Nighthawks and its genesis in the penetrating documentary Strip Jack Naked (1991). Incorporating biographical material and poignant out-takes featuring actors who had been left on the cutting-room floor, the film also takes in the Aids crisis and homophobia. Peck reveals that threats of violence were made against him after UK tabloids objected to the Channel 4 screening of Nighthawks in the mid-80s.



Ron Peck, along with classmates from the London Film School, formed Four Corners Films, a workshop collective in Bethnal Green, east London, an area that the director made his home in 1975. Photograph: Mark Ayres

His other films, often rough-and-ready but always heartfelt and beautifully observed, were set largely in the boxing world. These included the documentary Fighters (1991) and the television film Real Money (1996). The latter was a scripted drama cast with real boxers, as was Cross-Channel (2011). These were made by Team Pictures, the company Peck established in 1985 with Mark Ayres to produce Empire State.

It evolved in 1998 into a production and editing facility, as well as a site for acting workshops and film screenings. His last film, Canning Town Voices, a documentary about changes in the Canning Town area of London, is available on YouTube.

As LGBTQ+ issues became part of mainstream life, the reputation of Nighthawks continued to grow. A film that was once criticised for its dourness even began to seem that bit warmer in the era of impersonal dating apps. After a screening in Paris in 2014, one audience member told Peck: "People behaved much more kindly then."

He is survived by his brother, David.

● Ronald Lindsay Peck, film director, born 15 May 1948; died 2 November 2022

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Access All Areas review – brave family's quest to change attitudes to disability

Leslie Felperin

The intentions behind this documentary about disabled rights activist Simon Sansome and his wife, Kate, are noble, but the tacky, cliché-ridden execution doesn't live up to them. Essentially, the film is built around one long interview with the Sansomes on how, not long after their wedding, Simon suddenly found himself paralysed from the waist down ("Little did we know it was going to be our final dance together," he says). The combination of a clumsy chiropractor, a rare condition and misdiagnosis turned him into a wheelchair user.

The change in circumstances would lead to Simon losing his job as a Liberal Democrat councillor in his Leicestershire district and much anguish for the couple. Eventually, he discovered a way to make a difference by starting a campaign to improve access for disabled people and change attitudes. When Facebook wouldn't let him share a tasteful image of a nude woman with a partially amputated leg, he kicked up a fuss and taped one of their representatives on the phone explaining that, at the time, the social media company censored images that some people might find disturbing. This surely must have caused a terrible headache for former Liberal Democrat leader Nick Clegg, now chief shill for Facebook, but the publicity did wonders for Simon's Ability Access group, which forced the social media giant to apologise.



▲ 'A nice couple facing a challenging situation' … Simon Sansome and his wife, Kate, in Access All Areas Photograph: Publicity image

All rousing stuff, and the Sansomes come across as a nice couple facing a challenging situation with bravery and fortitude. But director Charlotte Fantelli really lays on the sentimentality thick, with a syrupy score and embarrassingly bad reconstructions featuring actors playing Simon and Kate (Olly Bassi and Sarah Jane Honeywell) at key points in their "journey". It's especially distracting that the actors look like idealised, glossier versions of the subjects they are impersonating, a discrepancy that we're constantly reminded of because the film keeps cutting back to the actual people.

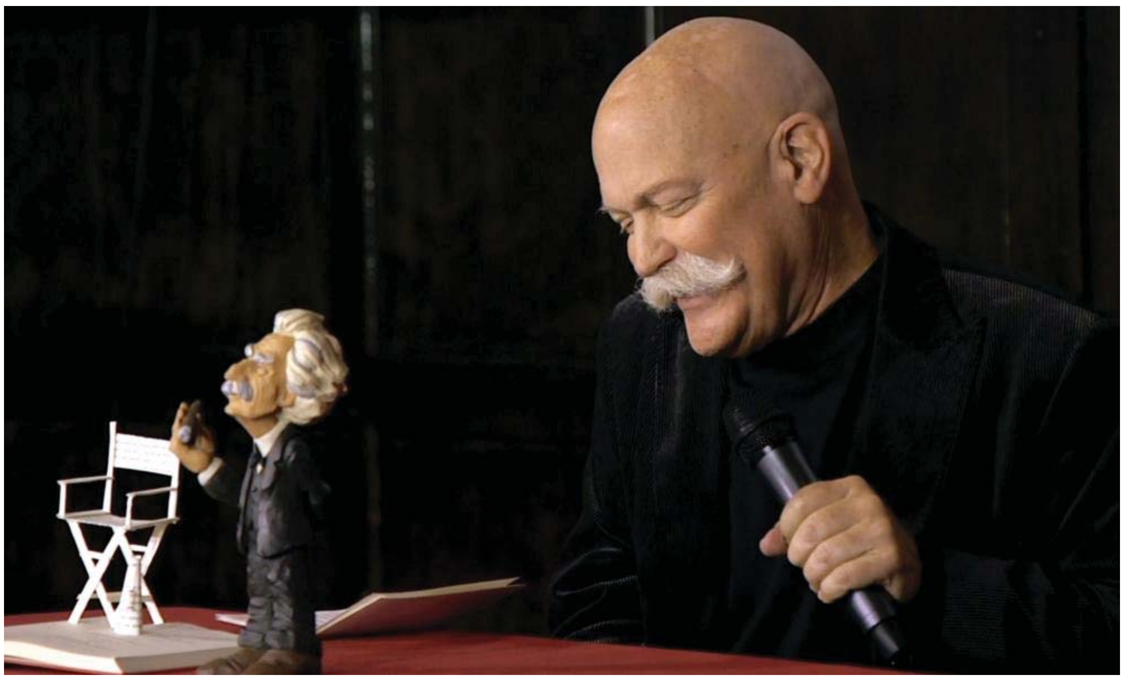
● Access All Areas is released on 21 November on digital platforms.

Claydream review – claymation genius behind California Raisins tells own story

Leslie Felperin

This documentary about animation maven Will Vinton, whose medium of preference was clay filmed in stop motion, covers his remarkable career in detail, with expected reverence. Strictly as a documentary it's conventional and a bit snoozy, but animation geeks will revel in the chance it affords to learn more about Vinton, a mostly genial chap who nevertheless had some sharp corners to his character. While the narrative mostly follows a straight-ahead, chronological path through Vinton's biography, the story comes with a classic parable about how small companies can end up crashing and burning, especially when they get mixed up with strictly material-minded MBA-holders and aggressively controlling angel investors.

Then again, it's clear Vinton also had himself partly to blame for his eventual business travails, although for the most part he ran a pretty profitable studio in Portland, Oregon, at a time when few film companies dared to operate more than 50 miles from downtown Los Angeles. Clearly made in cooperation with Vinton (who died in 2018) and his family, director Marq Evans looks back to his subject's youthful enthusiasm for countercultural hedonism available around his early base in Berkeley, California, a scene that shaped his aesthetic. His first major work – Closed Mondays, co-directed by Bob Gardiner – was rejected by the first film festival they sent it to, but then eventually went on to win an Oscar for best animated short in 1975.



▲ Genial genius … Will Vinton in Claydream

This introduces a further subplot about how Vinton fell out with the talented but erratic Gardiner, who may have been suffering from bipolar disorder. Still, without Gardiner, Vinton and his team went on to make some lovely work, including an adaptation of The Little Prince, and some less lovely but extraordinarily popular work, such as the adverts featuring singing raisins that became a franchise of sorts. In the light of that success, it doesn't seem quite so crazy that at one point there was talk of starting a Vinton Studio-themed amusement park; this nugget of info is among many recounted here that seem outrageously unlikely but somehow typical of Vinton's unusual career.

● Claydream is available on 21 November on digital platforms.

Australia's 'carbon capital' charts a course away from fossil fuels and a boom-bust cycle

Joe Hinchliffe

The 6.30am twin-engine service from Brisbane to Gladstone on Monday morning is chock full of blokes in hi-vis and heavy boots.

But this week federal public servants, journalists, renewable energy advocates and the Queensland energy minister joined the usual crowd of Fifo workers descending on the town.

They travelled for the Gladstone council's unveiling of a 10-year energy transition plan, designed to reposition the region as "a renewable energy superpower".

The glossy brochures accompanying the plan are big on lofty ambition but light on measurable outcomes. The talk is of a rapidly expanding workforce building "massive amounts" of large scale renewable energy projects and of leading global green hydrogen production.

This kind of document would not often make national news. But this is Gladstone, the world's fifth largest coal exporting port, a harbour town built on heavy industries like alumina, ammonia and liquefied natural gas exports.

It is Australia's "carbon capital".

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That economic transition is being spoken about at all – let alone loudly spruiked by the mayor and unanimously backed by his council – is significant.

"A few years ago talking about renewables was a taboo subject," Gladstone Conservation Council's Anna Hitchcock says. "Now it's all totally out in the open."

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For one of the plan's leading architects, The Next Economy's chief executive, Dr Amanda Cahill, that's the point.

The roadmap is not one of graphs and modelling she says. Though research-based, it is more of a "wayfinder". Governments can aim for net zero targets in 2050, but the pace of technological change is happening so fast that "if you can see beyond five years you're doing well".

The plan stakes out council's role in the transition in areas like building facilities to make sure workers choose to raise families locally, not fly back to their homes. Cahill says the plan is also about sending a message.

"[This is] a signal to the world that there has been a shift about where people's heads are at and what they are willing to do," she says.

So could this region, synonymous in the imagination of many with infamous clashes between coalminers and the environmentalists, really be gearing up to drive the country towards a green energy future?

That might be the question, but talk in the town on Monday is dominated by another portentous arrival that morning.



▲ The QAL alumina refinery has become a landmark in Gladstone, where the council has released a new energy transition plan. Photograph: Climate Media Centre

Down at the Gladstone coal exporters maritime precinct – funded by Wiggins Island Coal Export Terminal Pty Ltd 2014 (Stage 1), a sign reminds visitors – a crowd of stall holders awaits the MS Noordam, the first cruise ship to dock since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Lorraine Christopher is among them, hoping to sell some of the hats, stubby holders and jewellery she makes from flattened beer and premix cans, ring pulls and yarn.

When it comes to the energy transition, the 83-year-old is agnostic and philosophical. She doesn't care much for what the big end of town produces.

But from her home in a nearby caravan park, she has had a front-row seat to the sometimes devastating impacts of the booms and busts of the town's industry on the people who live there.

When Christopher and her then husband moved to Gladstone in 1968, one of the largest alumina refineries in the world, Queensland Alumina Limited (QAL), had just fired up production.

Good luck finding a place to live, was the advice from a real estate agent. About five years ago another boom, this time LNG, saw her caravan park swollen with itinerant workers. Now it stands largely empty.

The many vacant stores that scar Gladstone's main drag, the abandoned childcare centre and the closure of its maternity ward are all reminders of recent better times.

Even Gladstone's deputy mayor, Kahn Goodluck, says the town is no stranger to "boom-bust, winner-loser cycles".

Like his brothers and father, the former boilermaker has his family name tattooed across his fingers. He is still in touch with many old mates from the factories, and he knows those who got the right jobs and bought the right homes at the right time. He also knows those who saw the value of their homes plummet hundreds of thousands of dollars below what they paid, saddling them with debt larger than many will ever make back.

"That shouldn't be how we do business," he says.

Which is the major caveat to the council's otherwise upbeat plan. The transition will leave a positive economic legacy, it says, "if managed well".

Economist Ross Garnaut writes about the Gladstone region at length in his latest book The Superpower Transformation.

Unlike the commodity-led booms, he identifies an opportunity for sustained, steady growth. "This is a transformation and not part of the commodity cycle," he says.

But like the berthing of the Noordam, it brings both opportunity and real risk.

Now that industry, government and investors "suddenly have permission" to talk transition, Cahill says "the floodgates have opened and everyone wants to move really fast".

Yet so many key questions remain unanswered. A large scale hydrogen industry will require massive amounts of fresh water. Three years of La Niña has brought widespread flooding across much of Australia – but Gladstone's drought declaration was only lifted this month.

Central Queensland University's chair in hydrogen and renewable energies, Prof Murray Shearer, says the industry will turn to desalination, if only as a backup. That produces briny water as byproduct. But Gladstone is the gateway to the southern Great Barrier Reef.

And just how much land will be cleared for the wind and solar required to produce the massive amount of energy that an export hydrogen industry and the manufacture of green steel, aluminium, electrolysers and batteries will demand?

To these environmental concerns, the conservation council's Hitchcock adds the social. There is already a housing crisis in regional Queensland "even before you add boom conditions to the mix".

"I understand the imperative to reduce carbon emissions and am all for that," she says. "But at what cost?"



▲ Lorraine Christopher at a market to welcome the first cruise ship to arrive in Gladstone since the pandemic broke out. Photograph: Joe Hinchliffe/The Guardian

It is the cost of not making the transition, however, that keeps the deputy mayor awake at night.

A lookout above the port, beside an abandoned cafe, offers an almost 360 degree view of smelting plants, the flaring towers of refineries and great piles of coal being loaded on to cargo ships amid a patchwork of mangroves, wooded hills and water.

There, a bronze toposcope marks the sites of industry alongside those of the mountains, rivers and islands, as if the QAL alumina refinery and the Clinton coal facility were as immutable features of the landscape as Mount Larcom and the Calliope River.

Goodluck fears they are not. Rio Tinto, the town's "largest employer bar none", has committed to net zero by 2050. But Gladstone accounts for about half of Rio Tinto's global emissions, he says. Currently it wants to invest, not divest. But what if the multinational decides transitioning the town is too hard?

It would, he says, become a ghost town. But the councillor remains upbeat that, with the right plans set in place, not only can existing industry be saved, new industry will be built.

"If we can't do it, it can't be done," Goodluck says.

India's energy conundrum: committed to renewables but still expanding coal

Hannah Ellis-Petersen South Asia correspondent

Three days before India's environment minister boarded a flight to Egypt for this year's UN climate summit, Cop27, the country's finance minister was busy with a new announcement.

"India needs greater investment in coal production," said Nirmala Sitharaman at the Delhi launch of India's biggest ever coalmine auction, where 141 new sites for coalmines will be sold off to the highest bidder.

At a time when the world's future hinges on a dramatic global reduction of carbon dioxide emissions and global leaders are gathered in Sharm el-Sheikh to try to limit the impact of the climate crisis – with decarbonisation on the agenda – the Indian government is continuing on its biggest ever push for domestic coal production, even toying with the idea of producing so much it could become a future coal exporter.

This was the sixth, and largest, such auction the Indian government has held since 2020, when it privatised the coal industry. Two-thirds of the 968 sites that are allocated for mines, known as coal blocks, are on untouched land and many sit under India's most ecologically rich and fragile forests, and rural areas populated by tribal communities that will be destroyed if the new projects go ahead.



▲ An open pit coal mining site in the Wokha district of Nagaland, India. Photograph: Yirmiyan Arthur/AP

"The worst part is that in order to open up more coal, the government is allowing mining in dense forested areas. Forests are sinks of carbon dioxide so if you are getting new coal to burn by chopping down forests, it's a double whammy of environmental disaster," said Sudiep Shrivastava, a lawyer who has fought back against new coal blocks.

In Hasdeo Arand, a dense forested area in the state of Chhattisgarh, where 23 coal blocks have been proposed and seven approved – which would wreak havoc on some of India's oldest and most biodiverse environments and displace thousands of tribal people – communities have been fighting back against the mines.

According to anti-mining activists, opening up coalmines in the area will not only lead to the loss of thousands of hectares of forest land, but also affect the flow of the river, cause pollution and displace many villagers and tribal communities who live off the forests. In October last year, hundreds of villagers from the region marched almost 200 miles on foot from their villages to the state capital, Raipur, to register a protest against the proposed coalmines.

On the global stage, India's prime minister, Narendra Modi, has presented himself as a staunch environmentalist, and speaking at the G20 meeting on Tuesday, Modi said: "India is committed to clean energy and environment." Yet India has also made no secret of the fact that it will need coal for decades to come, even as it increases its reliance on renewables and moves towards net zero in 2070.

It was one of the most dramatic moments at the Cop26 climate talks in Glasgow last year when India, backed by China, made a last-minute intervention to water down the language of the final agreement, changing the commitment to "phase down" rather than "phase out" coal power. Coal currently accounts for 70% of electricity generation in India, while renewables count for only about 12%.

At Cop27 this year, the Indian position has been to try to counter the pressure to reduce its continued reliance on coal by pushing for an agreement to phase down all fossil fuels, including gas, which Europe and the US are still heavily dependent on. India's argument is that it is unfair to single out coal – which is primarily used by developing countries – while other fossil fuels widely used in western countries remain unsanctioned. Speaking on Monday, the environment minister, Bhupender Yadav, who is representing India at Cop27, accused developed nations of "turning back to fossil fuels" as the energy crisis hit.



▲ According to anti-mining activists, opening up coalmines will not only lead to the loss of thousands of hectares of forest land, but also affect the flow of the Hasdeo River. Photograph: Franck Metois/Alamy

Ashish Fernandes, the chief executive officer of Climate Risk Horizons, which analyses the impact of the climate crisis in India, said: "It's quite clear because of the west's failure to live up to its commitments to undertake serious emissions reductions and to meet the promised financing commitments, India is using coal as a bargaining chip. It's hard to criticise India's plans for new coal when Europe is looking to build up so much more new gas."

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India is already at the forefront of the climate crisis. This year two-thirds of the country suffered months of an unprecedented heatwave that decimated crops and livelihoods. There were extreme weather events on 80% of days this year.

Yet the Indian government's position is that as a fast-developing country, which is the world's second-largest importer of coal, it is necessary in the name of self-reliance and energy security for the country to take advantage of its own vast domestic coal reserves, said to be the fourth largest in the world. As a historically low emitter of carbon emissions compared with the west, ministers claim it is unfair to penalise such actions. Under plans promoted by Modi, India plans to increase its domestic coal production to a 1bn tonnes a year.

In the year since Cop26, the government says the situation has become even more pressing. India's electricity demand soared post-Covid and foreign coal prices hit record highs because of inflation and the war in Ukraine, costing the government billions of rupees to import what was needed.

In April, after the hottest March in 122 years, the country suffered a grave coal shortage and some coal-fired power stations had less than three days supply left, resulting in rolling power cuts.

Nivit Yadav, programme director at the environment thinktank Centre for Science and Environment said: "You can't avoid the fact that India still needs coal and we need to reduce our dependency on imported coal, which is becoming costlier by the day. Long term, we definitely want our reliance on coal to be reduced as much as possible but there is so much conflict around the world, India has to secure its energy."

Yet environmentalists and think-tanks have argued that opening up hundreds of new coalmines across India is both environmentally devastating and unnecessary. Multiple studies have shown that India's current capacity of coalmines and coal-fired power stations are more than enough to meet India's growing electricity demand if they operate efficiently.

The coal shortages that hit in April and May are said not to have been due to a lack of domestic coal, but instead poor planning by power companies, and analysis showed that they could have been avoided if there had been greater investment in renewables. India now produces the world's cheapest solar power, and prices will continue to fall.

"India does not need more coal," said Fernandes. "There is no financial or energy requirement for new coal construction in India, this is all political." He emphasised that India's current coal power generation was "suboptimal", only currently running at about 60% capacity, and if run properly would be more than enough to meet the electricity demands of a fast-developing nation.

On average, India's coalmines use only two-thirds of the capacity, with some large ones using only 1%, according to analysis by Global Energy Monitor (GEM), calling into question the need to open up more.

Fernandes said such huge new investment in coal now meant there was "a real chance that it will undermine the renewable energy industry" by tying India's electricity sector into a contractual commitment to coal for decades to come, even as renewables are cheaper.

Earlier this year, the International Energy Agency said Modi's coal expansion plans were "difficult to reconcile with India's evolving energy needs and environmental priorities".

There is also the issue that India's coal, with its high ash content, is notoriously polluting and inefficient to burn, requiring twice as much to produce the same amount of power as imported coal. It is also difficult to transport. Many coal-powered fire stations are on the coast, specifically built to receive sea shipments of imported coal, and are hundreds of miles away from the central Indian states where many of the coal blocks are located, putting huge pressure on passenger railway lines.

For environmentalists, one of the greatest concerns is that the push for new coalmines is coming as India's environmental regulations are being watered down, particularly for power infrastructure projects, while laws around coal "act like an implicit subsidy to coal development", according to a recent report by the Smith School of Enterprise and the Environment at Oxford University. Currently coal blocks are auctioned off before any environmental clearances are done on the area.

For the new coalmine in Hasdeo Arand, local people allege the projects have been given all the environmental clearances by the state government without their constitutionally-bound consent and by using fabricated documents.

"Once the forest is gone, the people will not only lose their livelihoods but also their heritage, their culture, their religion, because they worship the forests – but their voices have been silenced" said Alok Shukla, an environmental activist who has been at the forefront of the community opposition to the new coal mines in Hasdeo Arand. "Tearing it down will also affect the monsoons as well because it disrupts the whole ecosystem. Tell me, what coal is worth that?"

You can't avoid the fact that India still needs coal

Impose climate tax on fossil fuel giants, media groups urge

Damian Carrington Environment editor

Dozens of media organisations from around the world have published a joint editorial article calling for a windfall tax on the biggest fossil fuel companies.

The funds raised should be redistributed to poorer, vulnerable countries, the editorial says, as they are suffering the worst impacts of the climate crisis despite having done the least to cause it.

"Humanity has to end its addiction to fossil fuels," the joint editorial, which was coordinated by the Guardian, says. "Rich countries account for just one in eight people in the world today but are responsible for half of greenhouse gases. These nations have a clear moral responsibility to help."

The UN secretary general recently called for a windfall tax on fossil fuel companies, whose profits have soared as Russia's war in Ukraine drives up energy prices. Oil and gas companies made $100bn (£85bn) in the first three months of 2022 alone. Any success at the UN's Cop27 summit, taking place in Egypt, is widely seen as dependent on rapidly increasing the flow of climate funding to developing countries.

"Climate change is a global problem that requires cooperation between all nations," the editorial says. However, without adequate funding, there is no trust between the global north and south, according to Cop27 observers. "This is no time for apathy or complacency; the urgency of the moment is upon us," the article states.

A series of reports in the run-up to Cop27 have laid bare how close the planet is to irreversible climate catastrophe, with "no credible pathway [of carbon cuts] to 1.5C in place", the internationally agreed temperature limit to contain global heating.



▲ *Activists outside Cop27 in Sharm el-Sheikh, Egypt, calling for climate justice. Photograph: Sean Gallup/Getty Images*

Rather than the rapid fall in emissions needed, Cop27 was told they were likely to rise to record levels this year, with the UN chief, António Guterres, warning humanity is on a "highway to climate hell".

The editorial, published by more than 30 media organisations, notes the world's growing economic crisis but says: "During the pandemic, central banks across the world lubricated states' expenditure by buying up their own governments' bonds. The trillions of dollars needed to deal with the ecological emergency demands such radical thinking returns."

The organisations that published the joint editorial come from almost every continent, including the Hindu in India and Tempo in Indonesia, the Mail & Guardian in South Africa and Haaretz in Israel, Rolling Stone in the US and El Espectador in Colombia, and La Repubblica in Italy and Libération in France.

Katharine Viner, the editor-in-chief of Guardian News and Media, which led the initiative, said: "With Cop27 taking place in Egypt, we wanted to publish an ambitious editorial that highlights how strongly many different news organisations, and our readers, feel about the climate crisis. This joint editorial is a powerful demonstration of how news organisations around the world can come together to collaborate in the public interest."

Ozayr Patel, the climate and environment editor at the Mail & Guardian, said: "We realise that climate change cannot be fought alone. Collaboration is key and, in that spirit, we are delighted to be media partners with the Guardian and other outlets front and centre of the climate struggle. It is time to hold polluters accountable and we hope this is the first step to achieving that."

Aluf Benn, the editor-in-chief of Haaretz, said: "The climate crisis is the biggest challenge of our generation – and one that only international cooperation can attempt to solve. At a time when governments fail to do what is needed – both on an international and a national level – we must recognise the need for a combined effort, including by media outlets who have the moral responsibility to show the way."

Andre Wright, the acting editor-in-chief of the Gleaner, Jamaica's leading newspaper and also part of the initiative, said: "We join in the advocacy that the time has come for action. Experts believe we are already on an existential precipice; further procrastination will push the world over the edge. Climate justice is one of the most important global mandates of modern times. Major economies guilty of unsustainable investments in fossil fuels must be held accountable."

The issue of "loss and damage", which is the funding needed to rebuild in poorer countries after unavoidable climate impacts, has become central to Cop27. At past summits, rich countries, including the US, have rebuffed calls for such finance.

The joint editorial states: "The UN [summits] must be about the power of argument not the argument of power. The UN process may not be perfect. But it has provided nations with a target to save the planet, which must be pursued at Cop27 to stave off an existential risk to humanity."

Natalie Hanman, the head of environment at Guardian News and Media, said: "My hope is that in speaking with one voice, we remind people that this is a global crisis, threatening all of us. It's now imperative that world leaders listen, and act."

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'Everything has changed, nothing has changed': what's stopping green energy

Alex Lawson

On a breezy day in May, the Met Office issued a pithy forecast which would prove telling: "Quite windy." In fact, on 25 May the UK set a record for wind power generation, 19.9 gigawatts – enough to cover more than half of Britain's electricity needs, or boil 3.5m kettles. So plentiful was the wind power that National Grid was forced to ask some turbines in the west of Scotland to shut down, as the network was unable to store such a large amount of electricity.

The episode represents a landmark which underlines both the progress of Britain's renewables industry and the potholes in the road to replacing fossil fuels. Just six months earlier, global leaders met in Glasgow with renewable energy high on the agenda.

In the year since Cop26, the case for a rapid transition to green energy sources has been strengthened beyond simply decarbonisation, as countries have scrambled to replace Russian gas, bills have risen and the concept of "energy security" has shot up the public agenda. However, stopgap measures such as keeping coal-fired power stations active to get through the winter threaten to undermine and slow the energy transition.

As Cop27 nears, progress since last year's iteration has been bumpy.

"Everything has changed, and nothing has changed," says Keith Anderson, the chief executive of ScottishPower, speaking at the supplier and developer's London offices. "We have a cost of living crisis, energy is being weaponised and the discourse is now around energy independence. And how do you solve energy independence? You invest in renewables, which can be controlled, and built at speed." He adds: "Going harder and faster on renewables will deliver security, bring down prices and tackle climate change."

Casimir Lorenz of the consultancy Aurora Energy Research says: "Most people are aware now that if we had invested much more and much quicker into renewables we would not have been as exposed to Russian gas."

He adds: "Renewable developers have faced renewed pressure to finish projects and get them online while the prices in the market are very very high."



▲ *Decarbonisation is not the only consideration driving the push for green energy. Photograph: Hannibal Hanschke/EPA*

However, this task has not been straightforward. Rampant global inflation and freight headaches post-pandemic have stretch supply chains. For solar developers, a boom in demand over the last year has also left firms requiring sharp elbows – and companies are attempting to diversify away from some Chinese suppliers amid allegations they have used forced labour.

In the UK, the renewables industry has been dragged into the political drama in Westminster. The former prime minister Liz Truss set her sights on blocking solar farms being built on agricultural land, while indicating that restrictions on onshore windfarms would be lifted. The fate of both initiatives remains uncertain under her successor, Rishi Sunak.

Lorenz says a similar picture has been seen around Europe: "The development of renewables has been held up by economic factors but also regulatory and public resistance to renewables. That has escalated with political resistance, where we've seen populist countries come out against onshore wind to get people on side." European wind turbine orders were down 36% in the three months up to October on the same period a year earlier.

Some renewables companies have also been in governments' crosshairs after landing excess revenues from the surge in the wholesale price of electricity, which is tied to soaring natural gas prices.

"Regulators need to provide a stable investment platform," says Richard Crawford of InfraRed Capital Partners, the investment manager for London's Renewables Infrastructure Group, which has projects across Europe, from the UK to Sweden and Spain. "They need to manage the cost of electricity but also create a suitable environment for investors. We have had many periods in the past when prices have been beneath expectations and there's no investment return."

Crawford adds that revenue caps can act as a "negative investment signal" – making the cost of borrowing funds higher. As the industry is dominated by multinationals with projects in different countries, this can convince some companies to simply invest in an alternative market.

The economics should be appealing to policymakers. At a UK auction earlier this year offshore windfarm operators agreed to sell their power at record low price levels, as little as £37.35 per megawatt hour, 5.8% below the lowest bid in the previous auction in 2019.

Anderson argues that an age-old issue is holding back Britain's renewables industry: planning. "If I can build a major, complex infrastructure project in 12 to 18 months then surely to goodness we can have a planning system that can deliver at the same timescale," he says, shaking his head. To illustrate his point, he recounts how a planning official questioned the location of the East Anglia One North offshore wind project 12 years after the licence was awarded by the former prime minister Gordon Brown in 2009.

National Grid announced this summer it was making a £54bn upgrade to the electricity network, the biggest since the 1960s, to help connect offshore windfarms more easily and enable battery storage facilities to connect up to store renewable power, a crucial issue in the industry.

Gaining local consent is another factor putting the brakes on Britain's race for renewables. In April, Octopus Energy launched an attempt to prove the nation's desire for onshore wind, with a project named Plots for Kilowatts which matched up landowners with residents willing to agree to a windfarm in return for lower prices. Lorenz, who is based in Berlin, says that in Europe the public have been perturbed by "the fact that local people are not profiting from the fall in costs for renewables – and they can even pay more for higher grid fees in some cases".

In terms of ambition, the UK is toe-to-toe with its European counterparts.

The UK has a target of gleaning 100% of its power from renewables by 2035. The government increased its target for offshore wind capacity from 40GW to 50GW by 2030, while it hopes to triple solar capacity by 2030. Plans are also afoot for floating windfarms off the Cornish and Welsh coasts. Germany, exposed by its reliance on Russian gas, has upped its clean energy target from 65% to 80% by 2030, but EU an improved EU-wide energy goal is still just 45% by 2030.

In France, attitudes to offshore wind have softened while its nuclear fleet has hit difficulties this year at an unfortunate juncture.

In the second quarter of 2022, renewables accounted for 38.6% of electricity generation in the UK, up slightly on a year earlier but lower than the 41.9% registered for fossil fuels. EU figures show Sweden has the greatest share of renewables, at 60%, ahead of Finland, Latvia and Austria.

Meanwhile industry technology continues to evolve: in Kent a strawberry farm supplying Wimbledon is using vertical transparent solar panels to power its greenhouse while a vineyard in central Spain is now able to adjust solar panels to provide the right levels of shade to enhance the quality of the grapes. Crawford says windfarms are being gradually updated to retrofit blades to improve the "wake effect" for turbines downwind of the first turbine and increase their productivity.

As the industry heads to Sharm el-Sheikh, Anderson says competition between nations for renewable investment is fierce. "The UK has been doing better than anybody else up to now. But we're almost back at the start-line again after the pandemic and the current energy crisis. America is a very clear, structured environment for investment. Europe is getting its act together very, very quickly. So we need to ask: are we ready to go for it?"

Mike Cannon-Brookes succeeds in shaking up AGL board

Peter Hannam

Billionaire Mike Cannon-Brookes has succeeded in shaking up the board of Australia's biggest electricity producer, with all four of his proposed directors winning support from shareholders at AGL Energy's annual general meeting.

The company, though, won backing for its decarbonisation plans, which were less ambitious than those proposed by Cannon-Brookes, AGL's biggest single shareholder. AGL is the country's largest carbon emitter.

Patricia McKenzie, AGL's chair, told the meeting in Melbourne that the company's climate transition action plan – which would see it shut its final coal-fired power plant by 2035 – had support from shareholders. The vote was about two-thirds in favour.

McKenzie said that based on proxy votes ahead of the meeting, the five-member board would be expanded to include all four of Cannon-Brooke's proposed new directors: Mark Twidell, Dr Kerry Schott, Christine Holman and John Pollaers.

AGL's board had only supported Twidell, a solar energy veteran, ahead of the vote. It remains to be seen whether the expanded board, which also includes the recently appointed wind energy expert, Miles George, will opt to accelerate AGL's plans.

A spokesperson for Grok Ventures, a family company owned by Cannon-Brookes, welcomed the new board additions.

"This represents another majority vote by AGL shareholders pointing to their desire for change, fresh thinking and more execution capacity to realise the potential of this great company," the spokesperson said.

"The AGL Board has Grok Ventures' full support to deliver on the monumental task ahead, of rebuilding the company to lead Australia's green energy transition, for the benefit of all stakeholders," he said.

AGL's chair McKenzie also welcomed the new directors, saying the board "will work constructively with them in the best of interests of shareholders".

"It's great to have diversity on the board," McKenzie said in answer to questions, adding that Grok "does not control AGL".

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Cannon-Brookes had raised concerns about McKenzie's ongoing role as chair since she had backed AGL's demerger. That plan was ditched in May

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because of Grok's activism.

In September, AGL announced it would bring forward the closure date of its Loy Yang A brown coal-fired power station in Victoria by a decade, to 2035, while leaving its black-coal burning Bayswater power station in NSW running until between 2030 and 2033. AGL's Liddell plant, also in NSW, shuts next April.

McKenzie said AGL had the "ambition to add up to 12 gigawatts of new renewable and firming capacity by 2036, which will require a total investment of up to $20bn".

This plan included an interim target to have up to 5GW of new renewables and firming in place by 2030, she said, adding AGL now has a 3.2GW pipeline of high-quality energy projects and access to a 3.5GW high quality renewables development pipeline via its investment in Tilt Renewables.

McKenzie said each of the new directors had issued statements of independence, saying "they are not representing any particular shareholder".

In recorded comments, Schott said AGL needed cut carbon emissions "as much as they can, as fast as they can", that much of the company's value was in its gas and electricity retailing arms.Schott said it was important that the directors worked collaboratively: "The last thing a board needs is to be balkanised."Brynn O'Brien, executive director of The Australasian Centre for Corporate Responsibility, welcomed the shareholders' action.



▲ AGL has expanded its board to include all four of Mike Cannon-Brookes' proposed directors: Mark Twidell, Dr Kerry Schott, Christine Holman and John Pollaers. Photograph: Dan Himbrechts/AAP

"History has been made today," O'Brien said. "The board of an Australian listed company has been transformed by shareholders over its handling of climate risks.

"This is both a victory for shareholders and a scathing indictment on those who spent years destroying shareholder value by delaying the inevitable in the face of an escalating energy transition.

"It is vital that lessons are learned from AGL's colossal waste of time and shareholder funds.

"The boards of other high-emitting companies should be taking note of today's outcome: climate risk management is an ever-increasing pressure and those who remain flat-footed in the face of rapidly shifting market dynamics will be held to account."

Tim Buckley, energy finance analyst and director of independent thinktank Climate Energy Finance, said AGL had been "a global laggard in accepting and acting on the climate science" but was now at "a turning point".

"This board renewal is critical for AGL investors given the opportunity to start to reverse the $10bn of shareholder wealth destruction in the last six years, but also for the wider context given AGL is a key Australian energy sector incumbent, with financial resources and staffing that can be leveraged constructively, with the right leadership," Buckley said.

AGL would put its transition plan up for shareholders to vote on every three years, McKenzie said.

About 30% of shareholders voted against the remuneration plan for executives, delivering a so-called "first strike" that could place extra pressure on management in the future.

Geoff Wilson, an AGL shareholder and chair of Wilson Asset Management, said Tuesday's outcome was "a positive step forward for shareholder democracy".

"It is important that all Australian company boards understand that they only serve at the wishes of their shareholders," he said.

AGL shares gave up early gains to trade about 1.4% lower close to close of trade. The benchmark ASX200 index was flat for the day.

Humans could face reproductive crisis as sperm count declines, study finds

Nicola Davis Science correspondent

Humans could face a reproductive crisis if action is not taken to tackle a drop in sperm count, researchers have warned after finding the rate of decline is accelerating.

A study published in the journal Human Reproduction Update, based on 153 estimates from men who were probably unaware of their fertility, suggests that the average sperm concentration fell from an estimated 101.2m per ml to 49.0m per ml between 1973 and 2018 – a drop of 51.6%. Total sperm counts fell by 62.3% during the same period.

Research by the same team, reported in 2017, found that sperm concentration had more than halved in the last 40 years. However, at the time a lack of data for other parts of the world meant the findings were focused on a region encompassing Europe, North America and Australia. The latest study includes more recent data from 53 countries.

Declines in sperm concentration were seen not only in the region previously studied, but in Central and South America, Africa and Asia.

Moreover, the rate of decline appears to be increasing: looking at data collected in all continents since 1972, the researchers found sperm concentrations declined by 1.16% per year. However, when they looked only at data collected since the year 2000, the decline was 2.64% per year.



▲ A human sperm cell. Photograph: Burazin/Getty Images

"I think this is another signal that something is wrong with the globe and that we need to do something about it. So yes, I think it's a crisis, that we [had] better tackle now, before it may reach a tipping point which may not be reversible," said Prof Hagai Levine, first author of the research from the Hebrew University of Jerusalem.

Previous studies have suggested that fertility is compromised if sperm concentration falls below about 40m per ml. While the latest estimate is above this threshold, Levine noted that this is a mean figure, suggesting the percentage of men below this threshold will have increased.

"Such a decline clearly represents a decline in the capacity of the population to reproduce," he said.

While the study accounted for factors including age and how long men had gone without ejaculation, and excluded men known to suffer from infertility, it has limitations, including that it did not look at other markers of sperm quality.

Allan Pacey, professor of andrology at the University of Sheffield, who was not involved in the work, praised the analysis, but said he remained on the fence over whether there is a decline.

"Counting sperm, even with the gold standard technique of [the laboratory process] haemocytometry, is really difficult," he said. "I believe that over time we have simply got better at it because of the development of training and quality control programmes around the world. I still think this is much of what we are seeing in the data."

However, Levine dismissed such concerns, adding that, in any case, the decline has been more pronounced in more recent years.

While it is unclear what might be behind the apparent trend, one hypothesis is that endocrine-disrupting chemicals or other environmental factors may play a role, acting on the foetus in the womb. Experts say factors such as smoking, drinking, obesity and poor diet might also play a role, and that a healthy lifestyle may help to boost sperm counts.

Tina Kold Jensen of the University of Southern Denmark said the new study recapitulated a concerning trend. "You keep on finding the same trend, no matter how many studies you include – that is a bit scary to me," she said.

Prof Richard Sharpe, an expert in male reproductive health at the University of Edinburgh, said the new data showed that the trend appeared to be a worldwide phenomenon.

Sharpe said the decline could mean it takes longer for couples to conceive and, for many, time is not on their side as they are delaying trying to conceive until the woman is in her 30s or 40s, when her fertility is already reduced.

"The key point that needs to be made is that this is desperately bad news for couple fertility," he said.

But, said Sharpe, "These issues are not just a problem for couples trying to have kids. They are also a huge problem for society in the next 50-odd years as less and less young people will be around to work and support the increasing bulge of elderly folk."

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What is black mould and what health problems can it cause?

Ian Sample Science editor

Mould is very common in homes. It can grow on tiles, fabrics, carpets, wood and other materials when moisture is present. Key spots are around window frames, in bathrooms, anywhere condensation forms, and where leaks and rising damp lead to moist patches on ceilings and walls. Two black moulds commonly found in homes are Cladosporium and Alternaria fungi. Another black mould is Stachybotrys chartarum, which can release specific toxins that are harmful to humans.

What health problems does black mould cause?

Damp and mouldy environments in general can cause a host of medical problems, particularly in people who are sensitive to the allergens that moulds produce. Common ailments are sneezing, a runny nose, red eyes and skin rashes, but moulds can also affect the immune system and trigger more serious problems such as asthma attacks. Cladosporium and Alternaria can provoke severe, and even fatal, asthma attacks, and long-term exposure exacerbates the risk. Stachybotrys chartarum causes sick building syndrome, where toxins released by the fungus cause people to feel unwell. The fungus has also been associated with a potentially lethal condition called acute idiopathic pulmonary haemorrhage in infants, but a firm link has not been established.



▲ *Key spots are around window frames, in bathrooms, anywhere condensation forms, and where leaks and rising damp lead to moist patches on ceilings and walls. Photograph: Andrei310/Getty Images/iStockphoto*

Who is most vulnerable?

Babies and young children are at particular risk of health effects from mould, not least because of their small airways. Those with respiratory conditions, such as asthma and certain allergies, tend to be worse affected, as are people with skin conditions, such as atopic eczema, and those with weakened immune systems. A weaker immune system leaves people more vulnerable to fungal infections from spores breathed into the lungs.

How should mould be treated?

Buildings should be routinely inspected for water damage and mould. Any source of moisture needs to be dealt with by fixing leaks and dampness, controlling humidity, cleaning and drying up any flooded areas and ensuring good ventilation. Keeping homes warm and well-ventilated helps because mould thrives in cooler, damp conditions. Small amounts of mould can be dealt with relatively easily, but when mould is growing in carpets, ceiling tiles and on walls, professional services are often needed to remove the contaminated material. Painting over mould is not likely to be effective.

UK Treasury joins chat app Discord and is met with torrent of abuse

Alex Hern UK technology editor

The UK Treasury has opened an account on Discord to a torrent of abuse from users of the gamer-focused chat app – abuse they managed to send despite the government blocking all comments on the service.

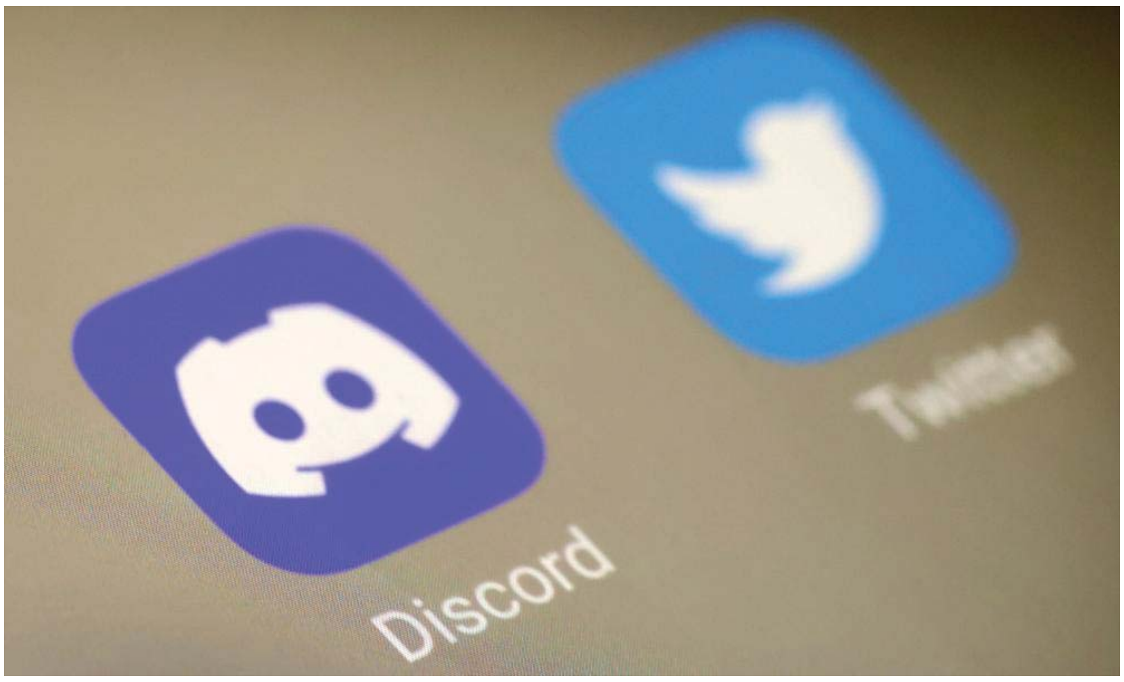
As Twitter's future looks increasingly uncertain, prominent users are preparing alternatives, directing followers to Facebook and Instagram accounts, handing out their Mastodon addresses, and setting up servers on chat apps such as Discord.

With its community-focused approach, where servers encourage tight-knit groups to form and discuss issues related to the overall focus of the topic, Discord may seem an odd fit for the strait-laced world of government communications.

But the app has a lot of users interested in finance, thanks to solid take-up among day traders and crypto fans, two groups the Treasury is eager to connect with.

The result: a read-only Discord server, where the only user who is allowed to post is the snappily named HMTreasurySocialAdmin1, who shares tweet-length news about the Treasury and chancellor.

But trolls will always find a way. Although posting is banned, emoji reactions are enabled, letting any user respond to a post from the Treasury with a single emoji, and new users are cheerily announced in a "welcome" channel.



▲ *Social media users are trying out alternatives such as Discord as Twitter's future looks increasingly uncertain. Photograph: Dado Ruvić/Reuters*

That means the Treasury's server has been eagerly posting automated messages such as, "Welcome, LOCK UP PRINCE ANDREW. We hope you brought pizza", and "Welcome Jeremy Corbyn. Say hi!". The latter does not appear to be the real account of the former leader of the opposition.

The latest official post from the Treasury has reactions including the middle finger emoji, clown emoji, and aubergine emoji, commonly used to indicate a penis. Less plainly abusive emoji reactions have included the trans rights flag, EU flag, and a pregnant man emoji, protesting against government policies in those areas.

Others have embraced the fact that letters are included in the list of emojis, and more than 100 people have apparently coordinated to attempt to write out the chancellor's name, "Hunt", underneath the post. Unusually, however, every one of them seems to have made the same typing error, accidentally spelling out a vulgarity instead.

Although the Treasury still has a Twitter account, it would not be the first big organisation to leave the social network following Elon Musk's acquisition. One of Musk's first official actions as Twitter chief executive was to end the company's old verification system and offer "verified" status to any user who paid £7 a month.

That led to a wave of impersonation, first of Musk himself, and later of major advertisers and celebrities on the platform, including Nintendo, Joe Biden and the pharmaceutical firm Eli Lilly.

A tweet from a fake verified account attributed to the latter claimed it would be making insulin free, and was live on the website for more than six hours as representatives struggled to contact someone at Twitter, which has laid off half its staff in the last month.

As a result of the chaos, the social network has introduced, pulled, reintroduced, pulled, and reintroduced a second time a new tier of verification, marking some users as "official" with a grey checkmark below their name. The move has come too late for a number of big advertisers, including GM, who have paused all spending on the site until "brand safety" issues are solved.

The company has secured one new advertiser, however: Elon Musk's SpaceX, which is launching a new ad campaign imminently.

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Olympic gymnastics hero Suni Lee to end Auburn career for run at Paris 2024

Associated Press

Sunisa Lee is going to make another run at Olympic glory.

The 2020 women's all-around gymnastics champion announced Tuesday that she will return to training at the elite level following the end of her sophomore season at Auburn next spring.

"I've been able to experience that once-in-a-lifetime feeling and the indescribable emotion when a gold medal is draped around your neck," Lee said in a social media post. "But I don't want it to be just once in a lifetime."

Lee, 19, became the fifth straight American woman to earn the Olympic title when she edged Rebeca Andrade of Brazil in a taut final at Ariake Gymnastics Centre, a victory Lee never envisioned until US teammate and 2016 Olympic champion Simone Biles took herself out of the competition to focus on her mental health.



▲ *Auburn University gymnast Sunisa Lee performs floor exercise during the finals of the 2022 NCAA women's gymnastics championship at Dickies Arena. Photograph: Jerome Miron/USA Today Sports*

The victory made Lee, who is Hmong-American, an instant celebrity. It also, however, did not keep her from fulfilling her commitment to compete for Auburn. The Tigers are coached by Jeff Graba, the twin brother of Lee's personal coach, Jess Graba.

Lee became the first reigning Olympic champion to compete at the NCAA level, with attendance at meets spiking wherever she and the Tigers went. Lee is hoping to lead Auburn back to the NCAA championships after they finished fourth in the finals last spring.

Yet with the 2024 games less than two years away, the Minnesota native will return to training at the elite level next spring in hopes of being ready in time to make the five-woman U.S. Olympic team. An American team led by 2020 Olympians Jade Carey and Jordan Chiles won gold at the world championships earlier this month.

"I have my sights set on Paris in 2024 and I know what I have to do to get there," Lee said. "I'm looking forward to rolling up my sleeves and putting in the work."

Philadelphia Eagles' bid for undefeated season torpedoed by Commanders

Associated Press

With uncharacteristic sloppiness, the Philadelphia Eagles' bid for an undefeated season is over.

The Washington Commanders turned methodical drives into scores and took advantage of turnover-prone Philadelphia, stunning the Eagles 32-21 on Monday night and sending them to their first loss in nine games this season.

Behind Jalen Hurts, the Eagles were 8-0 for the first time in franchise history and the last team in the NFL that could make a run at Miami's 17-0 mark in 1972 and the lone perfect season. The 2007 New England Patriots came close, going 18-0 before a Super Bowl loss.

"We started 8-0 together, we lost this game together, we're going to move on together," Eagles coach Nick Sirianni said.

The Eagles had their shot at perfection slip out of their hands.

Trailing at halftime for the first time this season, Hurts seemed to have one more big play left to pull out a victory. He connected on a deep ball to wide receiver Quez Watkins on a 51-yard reception late in the fourth quarter trailing 26-21. Watkins hit the ground, popped up and took off running, only to fumble the ball and give Washington possession.

That was it for the Eagles who gave away four turnovers, a bloated number for a team that had only three in the first eight games.



▲ *Washington Commanders safety Darrick Forrest, right, gets around Philadelphia Eagles wide receiver DeVonta Smith during the first half of Monday's game. Photograph: Chris Szagola/AP*

"Flush it and move on," Eagles defensive end Brandon Graham said.

Graham was flagged for a late unnecessary roughness call on QB Taylor Heinicke that extended Washington's drive.

"I was just trying to touch him down, because it just looked like he was going to get up. You just never know. But that's on me. I own that one. That's on me," he said

He wasn't alone in making miscues that cost the Birds.

AJ Brown had a catch knock off his hands and turn into an interception. And, Dallas Goedert fumbled in the fourth quarter when linebacker Jamin Davis grabbed the tight end by the facemask – but no penalty was called.

Heinicke again started for injured QB Carson Wentz, the much-maligned former Eagles QB who did play a key role in helping them win a Super Bowl in the 2017 season. Heinicke wasn't flashy, but he was efficient, going 17 for 29 and throwing 229 yards. Terry McLaurin had 128 yards receiving – including a 41-yard haul that led to a field goal. Joey Slye kicked four field goals.

Hurts was 17 for 26 for just 175 yards.

The Eagles were favored by 10 and a half points and the Commanders reveled in pulling off the upset.

"We had a marvelous time ruining everything," the Commanders' official account tweeted.

The Eagles tried to make the Commanders seem like just another bump in their bid for perfection, with the kind of early good fortune that they have enjoyed this season.

Take, for example, a roughing-the-kicker penalty that gave Washington a first down, and new life, on the game's opening drive. Eagles defensive end Josh Sweat strip-sacked Heinicke on the next play and the Eagles recovered. Hurts rushed up the middle for a one-yard TD and a 7-0 lead.

The Commanders then flashed their first clock-killing drive with a 16-play effort that chewed up more than seven minutes and ended with Antonio Gibson's one-yard rushing TD.

Hurts hit the highlight-reel with an ode to former Florida star Tim Tebow with a jump pass to Goedert for a six-yard score, and the QB struck the Heisman pose in celebration.

The points off takeaways and Hurts scoring with his arms and legs had been the key ingredients in the team's flawless start, and the Eagles certainly seemed poised to make it an easy night against a team they routed 24-8 in September.

The Commanders have showed a rare offensive spark of late and, after scoring 17 points in each of their last two games, took a 20-14 lead into halftime. Slye kicked field goals of 44 and 58 yards and Brian Robinson added a one-yard rushing score.

Washington converted 9 of 12 third downs in the half – they entered 26th in the NFL in third-down efficiency – and crushed the Eagles in time of possession 23:49 to 6:11 – the 17:38 disparity was their best in a first half in franchise history.

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Joel Glazer to 'make final decision' on Cristiano Ronaldo's Manchester United future

Guardian sport and agencies



▲ *Cristiano Ronaldo trained with Portugal in Lisbon in the leadup to the World Cup finals in Qatar. Photograph: Gualter Fatia/Getty Images*

Joel Glazer will make the final decision about Cristiano Ronaldo's future at the club after the forward's incendiary TV interview, according to sources close to the Manchester United co-owner.

Ronaldo's position at United is considered untenable after saying in an interview that he felt "betrayed" and that the Glazer family do not care about the club. The 37-year-old forward also said he has no respect for the manager, Erik ten Hag, and singled out two former United teammates, Wayne Rooney and Gary Neville, after they criticised him.

But a person with knowledge of the situation told the Associated Press on Tuesday that Glazer will have the final say on any decision to sell the forward and it will be up to Ronaldo's agent Jorge Mendes to present potential clubs willing to buy him.

The source also said United's hierarchy has backed Ten Hag's handling of the player and were fully supportive of his decision to drop Ronaldo from the squad and order him to train away from the first team after the Portugal star refused to come on as a substitute against Tottenham last month.

For the Premier League match against Fulham on Sunday, Ronaldo was left out of United's squad for a second game in a row after the club said he had an unspecified illness. But he trained with Portugal's national team on Tuesday as they began preparations for the World Cup in Qatar.

There was widespread speculation about Ronaldo leaving United even before the season started, but a potential exit is being complicated by the limited number of clubs that can afford to meet his reported salary of around £500,000 per week.

Ronaldo has six months remaining on his contract, and United's lawyers are reviewing footage of his interview to determine the club's legal position, the person with knowledge of the situation said.

In the excerpts of the interview that were released on Sunday evening, Ronaldo is heavily critical of Ten Hag, the owning Glazer family and the club in general. "I don't have respect for [Ten Hag] because he doesn't show respect for me," Ronaldo told the interviewer Piers Morgan. "If you don't have respect for me, I'm never going to have respect for you."

United officials have yet to see the full interview and had no knowledge that it had been conducted before excerpts started to circulate on Sunday. "The club will consider its response after the full facts have been established," United said.

"Our focus remains on preparing for the second half of the season and continuing the momentum, belief and togetherness being built among the players, manager, staff and fans."

Novak Djokovic faces battle to win over Australian fans after permission to return

Tumaini Carayol



▲ *Novak Djokovic in action during his group-stage match against Greece's Stefanos Tsitsipas. Photograph: Guglielmo Mangiapane/Reuters*

During the early days of January this year, in the heat of the Australian summer, the streets of Melbourne's central business district had descended into brief, surreal chaos. People sat across the pavement, groaning as they furiously rubbed their faces. Puddles of milk were scattered across the street after people had rushed through the adjacent 7/11 on Collins Street, emptying the contents of whole cartons on burning eyes.

After spending their days dancing and protesting outside the immigration detention facility where Novak Djokovic had been held because of his unvaccinated status upon his arrival in Australia, a group of his supporters descended on his lawyer's office. When they surrounded a car that they thought contained Djokovic, bringing it to a halt as some even stood on top of it, the police fired teargas. Those who did not turn away quickly enough soon hit the ground.

One year on from the pandemonium, there will be no repeat of those chaotic scenes, no further sightings of Nigel Farage embraced by Djokovic's family in Belgrade. Djokovic will soon be able to walk the streets of Melbourne again of his own volition. After being deported from Australia in January, which led to an automatic three-year ban from applying for a visa, on Tuesday Guardian Australia reported that the immigration minister, Andrew Giles, will overturn the ban and allow him to compete at the 2023 Australian Open.

It may mark the beginning of the end to one of the most bizarre periods in the career of any top player. In addition to his deportation, Djokovic's steadfast refusal to be vaccinated against Covid also meant he was not allowed to enter the United States for the US Open and other tournaments there.

Djokovic spent the early part of this year in poor form as he digested the events in Melbourne and he has missed large chunks of the season, but he has also won Wimbledon and three other tournaments this year, qualifying for the ATP Finals despite his limited schedule. He began his ATP Finals campaign in Turin on Monday with a straight-sets win over Stefanos Tsitsipas, the second seed, and he is the clear favourite. At 35, he is still considered by many to be the best player in the world.

The deportation from Australia was particularly symbolic because of what the city has meant to his career. The Australian Open was the site of Djokovic's first grand slam title in 2008 and where he has won nine titles, his most successful major tournament. He will return to Melbourne uncertain of how the crowds and public will receive him in a country that looks to rule-abiding as a national sport. Given it was his lack of tact when he announced on Instagram that he was travelling to Australia that initiated this episode, it will be fascinating to see how Djokovic handles his return.

This could potentially also lead to a significant moment in tennis history. Last year, Djokovic arrived at the Australian border seeking his record 21st grand slam title, yet the event ended, incredibly, with Nadal snatching the men's all-time record for himself. Djokovic will likely return as the favourite in 2023 as he seeks to equal Nadal's men's record of 22.

Many things have changed this year, including the election of a new Australian government. Anthony Albanese's party inherited a situation it had no hand in creating. In such a divisive issue, any decision it came to about Djokovic's visa was likely to lead to criticism.



▲ *Novak Djokovic won Wimbledon in July 2022, one of only two majors he was allowed to compete in. Photograph: Rob Newell/CameraSport/Getty Images*

But the choice to reverse Djokovic's visa should provoke further, far more important questions. He was not the only person being held in the Melbourne immigration detention facility. When his supporters went home, human rights activists remained for the refugees who had not moved an inch. Djokovic's presence there inadvertently underlined the cruelty of the Australian immigration system and its treatment of refugees who were held there, subjected to dire conditions and unable to leave, sometimes for many years.

Djokovic is famous and wealthy, and like many famous and wealthy people he has been shown grace. But for so long, the Australian government has pursued border policies that treat refugees and asylum seekers starkly differently, the point of its harsh laws being that its cruelty serves as a deterrent.

They should afford similar grace to those who arrive on their shores with far more at stake – their lives – than whether they will be present to hit a few tennis balls over a net.

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This World Cup is about much more than football. I've seen the human cost

Pete Pattisson

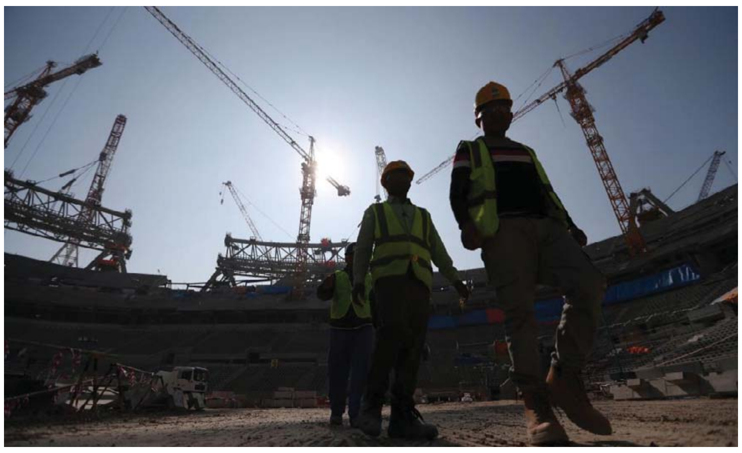
On a corner of my desk stands a giant stack of external hard drives. They hold the story, gigabyte after gigabyte, of almost a decade of reporting on the lives of Nepal's migrant workers in the World Cup host nation, Qatar.

On one, I recently found a photo from July 2013 of Tilak Bishwakarma holding a picture of his son Ganesh. When he left his home for Qatar, Ganesh was a teenager hoping to earn some money to support his impoverished family. Two months later his body was brought home in a coffin.

I opened another photo, showing a tattered piece of paper, listing the names of 22 other Nepali workers who died in Qatar that July. Beside each name is written the cause of death: electrocution, falls, road traffic accident. On 17 July came Ganesh's name. Cause of death: cardiac arrest.

Ganesh's short life formed part of a major investigation into the treatment of Qatar's vast low-wage migrant workforce (almost 90% of the country's population comprises migrant workers). It revealed an appalling catalogue of abuses – overcrowded, filthy accommodation, passport confiscation and non-payment of wages – which in some cases may have amounted to forced labour, a modern form of slavery.

When the Guardian published its exclusive story in September 2013 after I saw the coffins of Nepali workers returning home from the Gulf, it made headlines around the world. Football was literally coming down to a matter of life and death. There was something deeply offensive about the exploitation of some of the world's poorest people in the name of a festival of sport.



▲ *Construction workers at Lusail Stadium during a media tour in Doha, Qatar, 20 December 2019. Photograph: Ali Haider/EPA*

Fifa immediately said it was "very concerned", though clearly not concerned enough to have done its own due diligence. The next day Qatar's World Cup organisers sent a letter to the game's governing body assuring it that they viewed the Guardian's findings with the "utmost seriousness". Attached to the letter was a one-page "Workers' Charter" setting out, in skeletal form, their commitment to workers' rights.

For the next nine years, that commitment would be relentlessly tested and challenged by the Guardian's reporting. (If you value our dogged pursuit of justice, safety and fairness, please consider supporting our journalism today.)

We exposed how workers from North Korea were building a tower block – now a luxury hotel booked up by football fans – under conditions likely to constitute slave labour.

We documented the poverty wages being paid to the men constructing the new stadiums. In 2014 one told us he was earning overtime pay the equivalent of 45 pence an hour. Four years later another said his basic wage worked out at 60 pence an hour – 10,000 times less than the reported earnings of Lionel Messi.

We revealed that thousands of south Asian workers had died in Qatar in the decade after it won the right to host the World Cup, many from sudden and unexplained causes. The Qatari authorities have done little to investigate these deaths and countless families of the deceased have not received compensation from their employers.

Last year we found workers employed at opulent Fifa-endorsed hotels trapped by recruitment debts and rogue employers, earning less in a month than the cost of a standard room for a night.

And in September we revealed that some labourers at World Cup stadiums were living in squalid, windowless cabins on the edge of the desert.

Low-wage migrant workers face a cruel choice: stay at home and suffer, or take the risk and go abroad. For some the gamble pays off – money is sent home, houses are rebuilt and children sent to school – but for too many it's a bet they lose.

Reporting from Qatar is not easy, but the only way to really tell this story is to be on the ground, feel the searing heat, see the overcrowded labour camps and listen. And that's the hardest part. People are afraid to speak, because however tough their circumstances are, they need the work, so why put that at risk to talk to a journalist?

Before each trip I agree protocols with my editor in the event that I'm detained (as a number of journalists have been). Once in Qatar, I am constantly looking over my shoulder, metaphorically and literally. Interviews take place at night, or parked up on a quiet street or in the back of a nondescript restaurant. But by working independently and undercover we have been able to expose what they hoped to keep hidden.

So as the World Cup kicks off, if you value reading about the action in the stadiums, but also about the people who built them, please consider supporting a news organisation determined to expose the truth behind the slick PR of Big Football and the Gulf petrocrats. You can fund our work today, from just £1. If you can, please consider giving a little more each month or year.



▲ *A demonstrator holds a placard critical of Qatar's policies regarding the working conditions of migrant workers before a friendly between Scotland and Qatar in Edinburgh. Photograph: Andy Buchanan/AFP/Getty Images*

It makes a difference. The cumulative pressure of our reporting, alongside the work of human rights groups and trade unions, forced the Qatari authorities to belatedly introduce a number of new laws that have the potential to create real change for low-wage workers.

The abusive kafala system, under which workers cannot change jobs without their employer's permission, has – on paper – been abolished and a minimum wage has been introduced.

The reforms have neither gone far enough nor been implemented rigorously. But that's why this work matters. When the Qatari authorities and Fifa make overblown claims about what they have achieved, we will challenge them.

Our reporters know that it's about so much more than what happens on the pitch.

Support vital, investigative Guardian journalism today.

Carlos Alcaraz to end year as youngest No 1 after Rafael Nadal exits ATP Finals

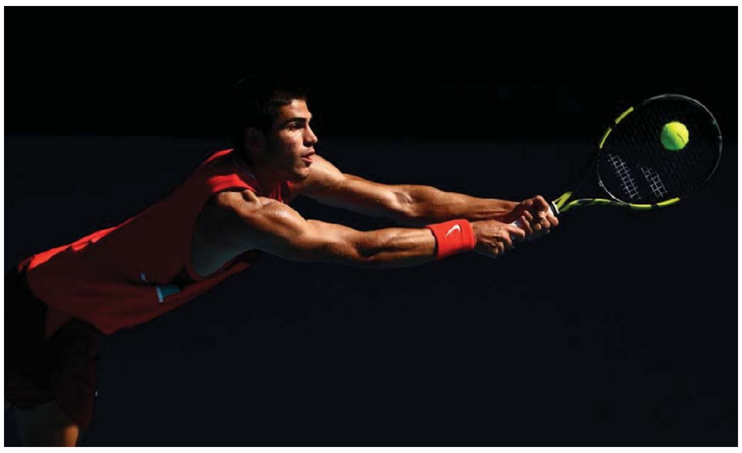
Reuters

Rafael Nadal was eliminated from the ATP Finals after Casper Ruud took the first set off Taylor Fritz in their round-robin match in Turin, which also guaranteed that Carlos Alcaraz would end the year as world No 1.

Spaniard Nadal needed to win the tournament to take the rankings top spot from compatriot Alcaraz, but straight-set losses to Fritz on Sunday and Felix Auger-Aliassime earlier on Tuesday left him needing Ruud to lose in straight sets to keep his hopes alive. The Norwegian, however, won the first set 6-3 against Fritz before securing victory over the American.

The 19-year-old Alcaraz, who is not competing at the tournament due to injury, will be confirmed as the youngest year-end No 1 since the ATP rankings began in 1973.

With his 6-3 6-4 loss to Canada's Auger-Aliassime, the record 22-times grand slam champion Nadal has now lost four successive ATP Tour matches for the first time since 2009. Auger-Aliassime, now coached by Nadal's uncle and long-time mentor Toni who sat in his box, will face Fritz in his final group match with a chance of making the last four.



▲ *Carlos Alcaraz is not playing at the ATP Finals in Turin because of injury but will still finish 2022 as the world's top-ranked male player. Photograph: Clive Brunskill/Getty Images*

"I had one match to get used to the conditions and I felt my game was better today, I was hitting it with precision and consistency," Auger-Aliassime said.

It was a disappointing display by Nadal who looked rusty having played only one tournament since the US Open.

"There are a couple of positive things. I was able to play two tournaments in the past three weeks. That's a positive, something that I was not able to do for a while," Nadal said.

"I don't think I forgot how to play tennis, how to be strong enough mentally" he continued. "I just need to recover all these positive feelings and all this confidence and all this strong mentality that I need to be at the level that I want to be. I don't know if I going to reach that level again. But what I don't have any doubt is that I (am) going to die for it."

Nadal held the upper hand at times in the first set and twice threatened to break the serve of his opponent, who was beaten by Ruud on his tournament debut on Sunday.Serving at 3-4 Nadal led 40-0 but a couple of double faults and baseline errors allowed Auger-Aliassime to break.



▲ *Rafael Nadal salutes the crowd after defeat to Felix Auger-Aliassime of Canada. Photograph: Valerio Pennicino/Getty Images*

Auger-Aliassime, who has won four titles this season, sealed the first set with a solid hold and moved a break ahead early in the second when Nadal stumbled trying to serve and volley.

Nadal showed the odd flash of brilliance but could make no impression as he slumped to a defeat.

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Australia fly in Marco Tilio amid doubts over Martin Boyle's World Cup fitness

Emma Kemp in Doha

The Socceroos have given their strongest indication yet that Martin Boyle's World Cup is in serious jeopardy, flying Marco Tilio to Doha as a potential injury replacement a week before the start of their campaign.

Australia's camp insist Boyle can still overcome the knee injury sustained while playing for Hibernian a fortnight ago, but the Scotland-born winger – one of his adopted country's key players – was absent from training for a second day running on Tuesday evening (Wednesday morning AEDT).

In his place was Tilio, who was not selected in Graham Arnold's 26-man squad but has been called up on standby in the event Boyle is not ready come the eve of the tournament.

Fifa regulations stipulate World Cup teams are allowed to replace an injured or ill player up until 24 hours before their opening match. Australia play France next Tuesday night (6am Wednesday AEDT).



▲ Martin Boyle's World Cup is in doubt as France clash looms. Photograph: Matt Roberts/Getty Images

Boyle, who has five goals from his 19 caps, has been under a cloud since the end of last month when he hurt his knee during his club's 3-0 Scottish Premiership win against St Mirren.

His Socceroos teammate and Hearts midfielder, Cameron Devlin, clearly articulated the 29-year-old's importance. "Over the years everyone can see what a big player he is," Devlin said.

"He does it week in, week out over in Scotland for Hibs. He's been a massive player for them and takes it into his country, Australia. He'd be a massive loss, but I think it's just precautionary because we've got the first game in a week. But if he wasn't to play he'd be a massive loss."

Tilio, 21, was a notable omission when Australia's World Cup squad was announced last week, having been considered on the cusp but lacking in consistent enough form and minutes for Melbourne City to warrant his selection.

At the time the City head coach, Patrick Kisnorbo, said "the hype" around the precocious forward "hasn't helped" and added: "Every week we get asked about Marco. It's only normal that sometimes people listen."

Every Socceroos player is now on the ground in Qatar, after the final few arrived late on Monday night local time – before Tilio materialised on Tuesday morning.

Even with the full complement, Tim Cahill had his boots on again, participating in warmup drills at the $1.3bn Aspire Academy, Australia's all-inclusive base at which the former striker is chief sports officer.

Cahill, while long retired, remains the last Socceroo to score at a World Cup from open play, via a head-turning volley against the Netherlands at Brazil 2014. Devlin, 24, met him for the first time on Monday.



▲ Marco Tilio has shown flashes of his potential at Melbourne City. Photograph: Daniel Pockett/Getty Images

"I spoke to him after training yesterday," Devlin said. "For someone like me to pick his brain … to have him here and ask him questions, if I can make myself a better player by listening to him, I'll take every opportunity to do that.

"He joined in training yesterday so that was pretty cool to be up alongside him with the boots on. Legend for Australian sport, so just to be around him is super surreal."

Joe Cokanasiga ruled out of England's match against New Zealand

Gerard Meagher

Eddie Jones has been forced to shuffle his back three for the match against New Zealand on Saturday after Joe Cokanasiga, who has started both of England's autumn Tests so far, was ruled out with an ankle injury. Jones is also thought to be weighing up a recall for Billy Vunipola to add ballast as his side seek a first home win against the All Blacks in a decade.

Cokanasiga sustained the injury last weekend in the victory against Japan with Northampton's Tommy Freeman included in a 25-man squad instead. Freeman could make a first appearance of the autumn against the All Blacks, though Jack Nowell is the more likely replacement if he is ready to start after his abdominal wall injury.

Nowell was due to start against Japan but was replaced by Cokanasiga on the day of the game. After the seven-try win, Jones said "there was every chance he could be available" to face New Zealand but Freeman provides another option, having impressed when making his debut on the summer tour of Australia.



▲ Joe Cokanasiga has been ruled out of the New Zealand game because of injury. Photograph: Toby Melville/Reuters

Vunipola was dropped for the victory against Japan, paying the price for an error-strewn performance against Argentina the week before, but he would add both power to England's forward pack and significant experience, having been part of the side who beat New Zealand in the 2019 World Cup semi-final.

It is believed Vunipola has trained with England's first-choice pack this week and he was name-checked by Jones when explaining how players involved in the 2019 semi-final would have an important role this week. Sam Simmonds impressed against Japan at No 8 and could consider himself unlucky if he were dropped but it is believed he and Vunipola have been training closely together this week, suggesting Jones may consider a back row in which they feature alongside Tom Curry with Maro Itoje returning to lock.

That would give England fewer lineout options – something Jones is reluctant to do – but he has spoken of his desire to not show his hand before the World Cup and used the lineout as an example. If Jones sticks with one of Simmonds or Vunipola, handing a second start to either David Ribbans and Alex Coles would be the most likely alternative when the head coach names his team on Thursday.

Elsewhere, Will Stuart is poised to replace Joe Heyes in the 23-man squad after recovering from a knee injury.

Meanwhile, England are aware of the dangers of deliberate time-wasting, according to the defence coach Anthony Seibold, after the French referee Mathieu Raynal was brought in as a late replacement for the fixture on Saturday. Raynal made a controversial late decision in the All Blacks' thrilling victory against Australia in September and after World Rugby announced he would be replacing Nic Berry, who has flown home for personal reasons, that incident has returned into focus.

Australia were on the cusp of victory in Melbourne until Bernard Foley was adjudged to be wasting too much time with Raynal overturning a Wallabies penalty near their own goal line and awarding a New Zealand scrum. The All Blacks proceeded to score the match-winning try, leaving Australia disconsolate. "It is a lesson to players," said Seibold, who described his decision to leave his post and return to the National Rugby League after the autumn campaign as "really difficult".



▲ Billy Vunipola could be recalled for England's match this weekend. Photograph: Ben Whitley/PA

"We've not spoken about it with the playing group but it is a lesson to players all around the world that referees want continuity. Anyone who has come down to training will have seen that we train with great intensity and not much coach-talk in between the drills. I think it's a good lesson for the players that if you deliberately stop the game, there are consequences. We want to go after New Zealand – we don't want to wait for New Zealand to come to Twickenham and come after us. We want to go after them. We want to start the game fast. We want to take it to the New Zealand side."

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Rory McIlroy says Greg Norman should 'exit stage left' and quit as LIV Golf chief

PA Media

Rory McIlroy believes Greg Norman should quit as LIV Golf chief executive to allow the "adults" to negotiate a peace settlement in golf's civil war.

McIlroy has been the biggest supporter of the established tours in their battle with the Saudi-funded breakaway circuit, but recently called for a compromise to be reached between the rival factions. However, McIlroy believes that will be impossible if Norman remains at the helm of LIV Golf, which is expanding to a 14-event league schedule in 2023.

"I think Greg needs to go. I think he just needs to exit stage left," McIlroy told a pre-tournament press conference before the DP World Tour Championship in Dubai. "He's made his mark but I think now is the right time to say you've got this thing off the ground but no one's going to talk unless there's an adult in the room that can actually try to mend fences."

LIV Golf last week denied reports that Norman would be replaced by the former TaylorMade executive Mark King, while there is also the small matter of various lawsuits to be resolved before any compromise can be reached. "There are obviously two lawsuits going on at the minute," McIlroy said. "There's the PGA Tour versus LIV and there's obviously this one that's coming up with the DP World Tour in February. Nothing can happen if those two things are going on. Right now it is a bit of a stalemate."



▲ Rory McIlroy gave his views on Greg Norman and LIV Golf at a press conference before the DP World Tour Championship in Dubai. Photograph: David Cannon/Getty Images

The legal hearing in February will determine whether LIV players such as Ian Poulter and Lee Westwood can be banned from the DP World Tour and therefore ineligible to qualify for the Ryder Cup. McIlroy admits his relationship with a number of Ryder Cup teammates has been significantly damaged by their defection to LIV Golf and feels they should not be on Luke Donald's side in Rome next year.

But asked if "forgiveness" was possible in an increasingly polarised environment, McIlroy said: "Yeah, I think in time, that can happen. It's obviously been a very contentious year in golf. The best thing in golf is to have all the best players playing together, and [with] what's happening right now that's not happening.

"So I fear for the game when that's going on. It's contentious because there's lawsuits going on and people suing people; it's very, very messy. If all that stuff can be sorted out one way or the other, then you can get to the stage where there's forgiveness and people can have dialogue and come to some sort of common ground or compromise.

"I don't think [golf] will have another year like this one because all of the noise has been about who is jumping ship, who is going where, who is staying, who is going. Very little of the storyline has actually been about the golf. So I think next year, if we can get the storylines to being about the golf and what's happening on the course, that's a good thing."

LIV Golf declined to respond to McIlroy's comments.

Gay Qataris physically abused then recruited as agents, campaigner says

Exclusive by Sean Ingle in Doha

Gay Qataris have been promised safety from physical torture in exchange for helping the authorities to track down other LGBTQ+ people in the country, a prominent Qatari doctor and gay rights campaigner has told the Guardian.

Dr Nasser Mohamed, who lives in the US but retains contact with hundreds of gay Qataris, said that some secret networks had been compromised after arrests by Qatar's preventive security department.

"A lot [of gay Qataris] don't know about each other," Mohamed said. "And it's safer that way because when the law enforcement finds one person, they actively try to find their entire network. But some of the people who were captured and physically abused were then recruited as agents.

"Now there are agents in the gay community that were promised safety from physical torture in exchange for working for the preventive security department and helping them find groups of LGBTQ+ people."

Mohamed told the Guardian that foreign gay fans in Qatar would not be persecuted while at the World Cup finals tournament. However, he warned that local LGBTQ+ supporters faced a very different reality. "What is it like to be an LGBT Qatari? You live in fear, you live in the shadows, you're actively persecuted. You're subjected to state-sponsored physical and mental abuse. It's dangerous to be an LGBT person in Qatar."



▲ A sign in Qatar on Tuesday advertising the World Cup, which starts on Sunday. Photograph: Mike Egerton/PA

Last month Human Rights Watch reported that Qatar's preventive security department forces had arbitrarily arrested lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender people and subjected them to ill-treatment in detention. HRW also documented six cases of severe and repeated beatings and five cases of sexual harassment in police custody between 2019 and 2022.

Rasha Younes, a senior researcher with HRW, told the Guardian that some cases were more striking than most. "There was one story of a transgender woman who was detained in solitary confinement for two months underground, lost her job as a result of being detained and was not able to give notice to her employer that she was gone," she said. "They shaved her 17-inch long hair in detention, severely beat her until she bled, and denied her medical care."

HRW is calling for the Qatari authorities to repeal article 285 and all other laws that criminalise consensual sexual relations outside of marriage and introduce legislation that protects against discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation and gender identity, online and offline. It also wants freedom of expression and nondiscrimination based on sexual orientation and gender identity to be guaranteed, permanently, for all residents of Qatar.

Younes also criticised Fifa for failing to do more. "We've been engaging with Fifa with other sports organisations and LGBT rights activists for years and they have not been paying attention," she said. "They have not been at all responsive or listen to the accounts that we have shared. Now that we have all this evidence, it's really time for Fifa to stop having its fingers in its ears and actually listen."

Fifa said it was committed to inclusivity and that it was "confident that all necessary measures will be in place for LGBTIQ+ fans and allies to enjoy the tournament in a welcoming and safe environment, just as for everyone else".

In a statement, Qatar's Supreme Committee for Delivery & Legacy promised the World Cup would be free of any discrimination. "The SC is committed to delivering an inclusive and discrimination-free Fifa World Cup experience that is welcoming, safe and accessible to all participants, attendees and communities in Qatar and around the world," it said.

"Everyone is welcome in Qatar, but we are a conservative country and any public display of affection, regardless of orientation, is frowned upon. We simply ask for people to respect our culture.

"More than 600 international and regional sporting events have been held in Qatar since we were awarded the rights to host the tournament, welcoming thousands of fans from every corner of the world. While the tournament is the biggest event yet, there has never been an issue and every event has been delivered safely."

Qatar's government has also been invited to comment on the claims made by Mohammed and HRW. A Qatari official has said previously that HRW's allegations "contain information that is categorically and unequivocally false", without specifying.

Edinson Cavani: 'Maybe I don't fully fit with modern football, in terms of attitudes'

Sid Lowe

Edinson Cavani is miles away. He has played in five countries, at some of the biggest clubs in the biggest leagues, alongside the biggest stars; he is about to represent Uruguay at his 10th international tournament; and he has racked up 785 games, scored 434 goals and won 26 trophies, but he cannot help being drawn to somewhere else entirely. Back to where it began, far from the training centre where he sits now, a necessary escape. "Name all those places, and I say: 'No, leave me in Salto,'" he says. "Beneath a tree, in the shade, where the breeze blows, without the sound of cars."

Cavani talks about the game as a "passion" inherited from his father, a forward who played against Luis Suárez's dad in Salto where the two Uruguay strikers were born three weeks apart. He discusses dedication, the competitiveness running through him, and the striker's art, dissected in detail and distilled in a line: "Football is time and space." There is a wonder at some of the things he did but still cannot explain and he describes a month at the World Cup as a joy "where you feel *totally* connected to football, where you *live* it, every second".

Yet there is something unusual about him; something that, it soon becomes clear as he chats in a gentle, pensive voice, does not entirely fit in football – not the way he believes the game has become. At times there is something almost philosophical, vaguely mystical about him, a lingering feeling that the world he inhabits is not really for him, much he would gladly leave behind.

"There are things I see and feel in football that – how can I say this? – I totally reject." And asked whether he feels different, he pauses to think, which he does often, and replies softly: "Atypical, maybe.

These days, success tends to be linked to fame, high life, luxury. And honestly, I do have my good life too, opportunities football gives me. But my way of life is very simple. Why do I like nature so much? I may never find the answer, but there's something inside that takes me there, away from this world, this routine, this dynamic that's so overwhelming. The only thing football doesn't allow me is to be where I



▲ Edinson Cavani after Uruguay's win against Peru in qualifying. 'There are things I see and feel in football that … I totally reject,' he says. Photograph: Raúl Martínez/AFP/Getty Images

like more often, out in the countryside."

Cavani fondly recalls matches, goals he has scored – the description of his first in Europe, paper and pad in hand, takes 10 minutes alone – but also visits to Monet's house north-west of Paris, pheasants in the countryside there, pine trees outside Naples, the lake by his Knutsford home, the daily drive to Carrington past green fields, a moment of calm savoured each morning. "I like all that is wild. Just walk, drink *mate*, see the green, the water. That produces pleasure in me. I don't know if it's a need, but it's a way of life, good for you."

A kind of therapy, perhaps – and that goes deeper. "There have been moments when I've needed professional help," the 35-year-old says. "I have friends who are professionals, and we go down a route that's more spiritual than psychological. Just talking sustains you. I talk to the psychologist about things that aren't football. We all hang on football and have little time to focus outside. Often a trauma begins with football but the psychologist helps you see it doesn't come from football alone; it can be your upbringing, parents, environment, the way you think you are because from very young you thought this was the only way to live, trying to be a footballer, a superhero.

"There's much you learn over time in football. It's 20 years since I left home, trying to overcome. You reflect, reach conclusions. Which doesn't mean what I say is the truth and I don't share it assuming it's *right*. But it's *my* way of confronting life. If there was a little book 'this is happiness', we'd all go out, buy it and live that way, the same way."

For Cavani, happiness is raising cattle, working the land, fishing, walking, getting lost. It's not that he might have been a vet had he not been a footballer; it is that he plans to be one when he is no longer playing, studying for the day he goes back. The contrast to the industry he has been in, especially at clubs such as Paris Saint-Germain, alongside players such as Neymar or Cristiano Ronaldo, entire industries whose status goes well beyond the game, could hardly be greater. Which may be part of the reason he is ready to return.

Which may also be, he suggests, one of the reasons why Uruguay overachieve, how a country of 3.5 million arrives in Qatar – "not much green there," Cavani says with a smile – believing the objective is to win.

"Why are we so competitive? Because they teach us to be," Cavani says. "Because pitches exist, everywhere. In every neighbourhood, every place, however deprived. Wherever there's space to kick a ball, there's a game. That competitiveness demanded as a professional is already there: you've been doing it all your life, every day, in the rain, any surface, playing barefoot, breaking a toe, wrapping it up and carrying on. I always say that in football it's not the same to play as to *compete*.

"We've kept that essence. Look at modern football, which is losing that essence. Maybe I come from that old school. Maybe I don't fully fit with modern football, in terms of attitudes, what it means to players. That doesn't mean you can't say how you feel, does it? I see it constantly: modernism, social media, how the world is, how technology has advanced, got into football. That changes mentalities. Before, everyone in a team had the same objective. These days, in certain teams for various reasons – fame, what people and press make players feel – that's not always the case."

There is something in Cavani's tone that expresses loss, a sense of disappointment, hurt. "Maybe so, yeah. True. Because I come from a school where the loveliest thing that can happen is to win as a team. For me there's no player who makes you win a World Cup on his own. He doesn't exist and never will. Someone can do something magical but you need teammates running, putting their life on the line. That's too often forgotten. Instead, it's all on the goalscorer, the famous name, the Ballon d'Or. That takes focus from what really matters, so that what a team wants to achieve becomes deformed, distorted. You feel that, you experience it. I've lived it."

Learned from it, too. "Because I've never had any desire for fame nor to be *the* best but *my* best, I've analysed teammates and, look," he says, pausing. "Because the most famous players get highlighted more and sometimes feel the need to demonstrate that …" There is another pause. "When I've analysed, I've seen negative things that helped me learn and positive things I've followed. Everyone has their own personality, you respect that, but there are things I don't want to ever have in my life, that I reject completely. That's my reflection."

The way he tells it Uruguay, like the countryside, is a refuge; a way of reconnecting with what was left behind. "A lot is about humility. Here, the player knows you have to be humble, step down from certain pedestals. These days, everything takes us to a place where the player is egotistical, because he's thinking about the awards, about …" Cavani pauses. "He leaves aside things that are nicer. If one day I got an individual award I'd be happy, sure, because it underlines your work, but it wouldn't change my life because the greatest happiness is a photo of my team at home."

How then do Uruguay avoid that trap, the arrogance, the selfishness? How does that not shift with the emergence of a new generation? "You know what it is?" Cavani replies. "It's that in our national team, like in our country, people like that are not looked upon kindly. It could be a cultural thing. That idea, that identity, is so clear from youth



▲ A mural of Edinson Cavani in his home town of Salto, to which the striker still feels a strong bond. Photograph: Raúl Martínez/EPA

level that it's already inculcated in Uruguayan players and hopefully will never be lost. That culture of work, sacrifice, unity which has seen us beat great national teams. It's not Suárez or Cavani or this guy or that, no. It's Uruguay. The objective is to win. And we're conscious that none of us will ever win anything on our own.

"All of us play at a high level but when you're in the national team you realise that the essence of football is *still there*," Cavani says, something almost wistful in his voice. "It's well-known names, stars at big clubs, yet you feel that solidarity, what football really is. I like to sweat my team's shirt. Sometimes you lose but I want to know my team gave itself entirely. When you win that way, you enjoy it twice as much. That's my philosophy of life and football. Earn it. Anything that comes easy never has the same feeling; he who simply receives never appreciates it the way he would when it costs, when there's sacrifice.

"One of the things I've learned about myself through football is there's always a reason. When you work towards an objective, incredible things can happen. Coldly, sometimes, you can't understand it, can't grasp it, but if you pursued it, it can happen.

"The peace I need to approach football, what you see as pressure, is the knowledge that I respected my teammates, held nothing back. Fear grabs you sometimes but if you know you're giving everything – really giving it, not just lip-service – that lifts the pressure from you. You have nerves before a game, before a World Cup, but that shows you're alive, ready. The day I don't have that, I'll leave. People confuse that, they get it wrong: a little fear is good. And then, once you step out there, it's gone."

England end 2022 unbeaten but Norway battle back for draw despite red card

Sophie Downey at the Pinatar Arena

The Lionesses signed off on a successful year, ending 2022 unbeaten with a 1-1 draw against 10-player Norway. Rachel Daly's first-half goal was cancelled out by Frida Maanum late on as the final international break came to a close.

It had been 127 days since these two last met on that memorable summer's evening in Brighton. That day, Sarina Wiegman's side subjected Norway to an 8-0 drubbing on their way to winning the European Championship. This was a much closer affair as Norway, now under the management of Hege Riise, presented more solidity and defensive nous.

Wiegman was slightly disappointed as a goalkeeping error from Ellie Roebuck and her side's inability to find a second goal cost them a 17th win of the year. However, she was also keen to emphasise the positives. "I think I found the Czech game [last month] a little more frustrating, because we did a couple of things we could have done better," the England manager said. "I think today we could have done better too but we can take a lot of pluses out of the last game. So, it was disappointing [rather than] frustrating."

Her side was much changed due to both injury and taking the opportunity to bed in new faces. Five changes saw a much-awaited senior debut for Maya Le Tissier while Lauren James started in midfield and Daly was given a rare opportunity up front.

Norway had won three of their last five under Riise, most recently losing narrowly to France on Friday evening. The manager made three changes from that match with Aurora Mikalsen given a start in goal while Emilie Haavi and Lisa Naalsund provided fresh legs up the field.

It was the Norwegians who started the brighter, finding their feet quickly. Haavi made an impression straigh-

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taway, exploiting the space afforded to her down the left. She forced a smart save from Roebuck early on before setting up Naalsund who fired over.

England, on the other hand, were dominating possession but struggling to make an impact. They truly settled after one of James's trademark runs saw them register their first shot on target. The Chelsea midfielder has a habit of making football look easy and she glided past her marker with effortless skill before firing a shot into Mikalsen's gloves.

England looked in control and opened the scoring through Daly with half an hour gone. She rose high to head home a pinpoint delivery from Chloe Kelly, her ninth goal of the season for club and country.

Wiegman is not known for making early substitutions but three came at once after the break, perhaps with a nod to the busy domestic schedule ahead. Changes can disrupt rhythm and Norway saw it as an opportunity to put a new-look Lionesses defence under pressure. Amalie Eikeland had Roebuck stretching to tip over a curling effort before the keeper was alert to the run of Sophie Roman Haug.



▲ England's Rachel Daly, centre, challenges for the ball with Norway's Anja Sonstevold, left, and Mathilde Hauge Harviken. Photograph: Jose Breton/AP

This England side, however, have the ability to turn pressure around in an instant. Kelly's deliveries from the left have been of the highest quality recently and she produced two more that were crying out for a crimson shirt to get on the end of.

The 72nd-minute departure of Anja Sønstevold, given her marching orders for two yellow-card challenges on Nikita Parris, should have given England another lift. Despite their shortage in numbers, however, Norway were in no mood to throw in the towel and a big error from Roebuck allowed them back into the game. As the ball bounced towards her, England's goalkeeper missed her kick allowing Maanum to capitalise with a free shot at goal.

Wiegman was keen not to place the blame on her goalkeeper, insisting her side should have put the game to bed. "It's disappointing, but these things happen sometimes," she said. "When it happens to the goalkeeper, then it's a goal. As a team, we had to score another goal, and that's what we tried to do."



▲ Rachel Daly wheels away after opening the scoring. Photograph: Naomi Baker/The FA/Getty Images

England pushed for a winner with Katie Robinson providing fresh legs in attack as she became another to earn her first senior cap. Despite their dominance on the ball, however, they could not fashion a clear-cut opportunity and had to settle for a draw to round out their year.

'It's coming home': Indian expats welcome England to team hotel in Qatar

Sean Ingle in Doha

England's footballers were greeted by the bizarre but joyous sight of hundreds of Indian expats serenading them with "It's coming home" as they arrived at their hotel in Qatar on Tuesday evening.

As the England coach pulled into the five-star Souq Al Wakra hotel just south of Doha, the fans banged drums, blew trumpets and even crashed through a police barrier to get a better view. There were loud cheers for the captain, Harry Kane, and an even bigger one for Gareth Southgate, especially when the manager turned to wave.

There were also familiar chants of "England! England!" as well as the rather unusual "Southgate is our super coach! Sterling is our super star! Pickford is our super keeper".

It was another sign that this World Cup, the first in the Middle East and the first to be held in winter, will be very different to the 21 tournaments that have come before it.

There have been suggestions on social media that some locals are being paid by the Qataris to add a dash of spice, but the half a dozen or so fans the Guardian spoke to promised they were the real deal. They insisted they made their own jerseys, bought their own tickets to the games and supported England having grown up watching players such as David Beckham.

They were also happy to talk about the latest developments in the Premier League – and were clearly unhappy that a Scandinavian newspaper at the weekend had questioned their authenticity.

Sajidh, a 29-year-old mechanical engineer who did not want to give his full name, described suggestions that he and the others were receiving cash to be cheerleaders as "fake news". He said:"None of us is getting paid. We are diehard England fans.

"My favourite player was Beckham but now it is [Bukayo] Saka. If someone offered to pay us to support England we would turn them down. We are genuine supporters. Many of us grew up watching Beckham and Michael Owen. Our love is to this team."



▲ England fans gather outside the five-star Souq Al Wakra hotel, just south of Doha, to see their heroes. Photograph: Martin Rickett/PA

Another fan, Niyas, from Kerala, estimated that there were 700,000 fans in his region back home and he showed the Guardian an 80ft cardboard cutout of Kane and a mural of the England team in his home state. He also showed a WhatsApp group of supporters with nearly 1,000 members.

"We made these England tops ourselves," he said. "No one gave them to us. Argentina is the most supported team among Indians in Qatar, followed by Brazil. But then it is England."

As the England squad touched down, Kane insisted everyone was match fit and ready for the first game against Iran on Monday. "It's going to be massive," he said.

"I remember when we were out in Russia in our own little bubble. We saw all the videos from back home going crazy – it makes a big difference, it motivates us to be successful.

"We want to make the fans proud and happy. Of course, there will be some in the stadiums – we always have great support – but most will be at home and we just want to make them proud."

Premier League clubs face mixed risks of sending players to the World Cup

John Brewin

Pep Guardiola was notably accepting of Manchester City's defeat by Brentford in their last match before the World Cup. "My staff and I will have time to reflect on what we did well and what to do better," he shrugged. Guardiola and his staff may also have to watch events in Qatar through their hands, clenching as heavy tackles fly in and muscle injuries stack up given City – with 16 players – are the Premier League club sending the most players to the finals.

Even if Erling Haaland will be spending much of the next six weeks on the Etihad Campus, key players such as Kevin De Bruyne, Phil Foden and Rodri will return bearing the physical and mental scars of the tournament. And individual success in Qatar may not necessarily be good news for a player's club. To take the example of England's Euro 2020 finalists, a number of Gareth Southgate's players made indifferent starts to their 2021-22 club campaigns.

Such are the intangibles for clubs of this World Cup. Jürgen Klopp is a vocal critic of the tournament being staged in Qatar, particularly in mid-season, but he will see only seven players jet out to pre-tournament training camps. Like Guardiola, Klopp has a star forward getting a needed rest, in Mohamed Salah, but it is Uruguay rather than Liverpool who will be the immediate beneficiaries of Darwin Núñez's recent flowering.

Overall the Premier League is providing more World Cup players than any other division, with 134 players at the tournament – 16% – plying their trade in the English top flight. The league leaders, Arsenal, have 10 players in World Cup squads but their England contingent of three contains two players, Aaron Ramsdale and Ben White, expected to be reserves in Southgate's squad. The same may go for Gabriel Jesus and Gabriel Martinelli among a Brazil squad featuring heavy competition for forward places. Mikel Arteta appears to be getting off rather lightly, though how to motivate players disappointed at being underused is yet another consideration to add to the pile.

The response of players to disappointing tournaments is also important. How, for example, might Antonio Conte coax the best from Harry Kane at Tottenham should England's captain flop in Qatar? Or, to name another player among Spurs' 11 call-ups, someone carrying a yet heavier burden for his national team, Son Heung-min? Will

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his disappointing season so far – and the facial injury he is nursing – cast a shadow over his World Cup and consequently his return to Tottenham? Every player is on a sliding scale. How might they react to playing in a mid-season tournament in which their country's expectations are sky-high while playing for a different coach using probably very different tactics?

For managers such as Graham Potter and Erik ten Hag, relative newcomers to their clubs trying to install a fresh playing doctrine, losing players in mid-season is unhelpful. Manchester United, sending 14, have made significant improvements under Ten Hag, and though Cristiano Ronaldo can be discounted from the list of players whose fitness he will care about, Casemiro, Christian Eriksen and Lisandro Martínez have all been crucial to United's revival. Each is playing for a nation expected to go deep in the tournament.

Potter's Chelsea have stalled of late. His players have appeared unresponsive to his tactics. Chelsea will have 12 players in Qatar but a mid-season training camp planned for Abu Dhabi also gives Potter a decent core with which to work. Reece James, Wesley



▲ *How will a successful or unsuccessful World Cup impact the form of Aaron Ramsdale, Christian Eriksen and Lucas Paquetá? Composite: Guardian Picture Desk*

Fofana, Kepa Arrizabalaga, Marc Cucurella, Trevoh Chalobah, Ruben Loftus-Cheek, Jorginho and Pierre-Emerick Aubameyang are among those players not travelling.

Manchester United and Chelsea will return to action at Christmas looking at Newcastle in third place, and while Eddie Howe will not welcome a loss of momentum only five players are being lost from his squad to the World Cup, two of them – Callum Wilson and Nick Pope – likely to be on the England bench. And while Bruno Guimarães is a player Newcastle cannot afford to lose, other leading players from this season in Sven Botman, not picked for Louis van Gaal's Netherlands team, and Miguel Almíron, whose Paraguay did not qualify, will return to Tyneside after taking short rests.

Further down the table, the World Cup break throws up an opportunity for Nathan Jones, freshly arrived at Southampton, who are sending only two players. Should Bournemouth appoint a new manager – or Gary O'Neil stay on – only the Wales pair of Kieffer Moore and Chris Mepham will not be around.

Three managers ended the season's first tranche of fixtures under pressure. At West Ham David Moyes will have mixed feelings if England progress deep in the tournament, with Declan Rice a key midfielder. Lucas Paquetá, the summer's big signing, is yet to shine in east London but is favoured by the Brazil coach, Tite. Perhaps a good showing in Qatar can energise Paquetá's club season. Jesse Marsch will be roaring on Team USA, though in Brenden Aaronson and Tyler Adams he will fear fatigue in two players who have become important to Leeds.

Which leaves Frank Lampard, with Everton losing four players to the tournament. Until his mistakes at Bournemouth at the weekend, Jordan Pickford had been exemplary in goal. An injury or the loss of form that can follow for players scapegoated for English failure could mortally wound Everton. Such are the myriad equations the World Cup must turn over in the minds of Premier League managers.

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